

Virtual High School Program Evaluation

2007–08

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Submitted to
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Virtual High School Program Evaluation 2007–08

The Virtual High School Global Consortium (VHS) is a nonprofit collaborative of high schools that offers full-semester, yearlong, and summer school courses online to high school students. These courses can supplement school offerings, providing the opportunity for students to take classes that are not offered in their school or for which the student demand exceeds the number of openings.

The vision of VHS is “to be the leader in online education by working collaboratively with high schools to offer the highest quality courses for students and teachers” (VHS, n.d.a). During the 2007–08 school year, VHS offered 149 unique online courses to 9,186 students in 480 member schools.¹

In support of the VHS vision, this evaluation report presents quality benchmark indicators of course instructional quality, professional development quality, and program and services quality. In regard to these benchmarks, the annual program evaluation aligns with the following critical questions:

1. Is VHS feasible for schools?
2. Does VHS offer participation benefits to schools, teachers, and students?
3. Are schools, teachers, and students satisfied with the services provided by VHS?
4. Are the rigor and quality of VHS courses and professional development sufficiently high?
5. Has VHS expanded teaching and learning opportunities for schools, teachers, and students?
6. How well does VHS communicate, and how responsive is it to its members?

In addition to the focus on instruction, professional development, and service quality, the program evaluation also tracks the growth of VHS operations across several indicators. To provide context to the VHS quality benchmark indicators, the following section describes the operation of the VHS program.

The VHS Program

At the heart of the program is the VHS exchange model, in which schools trade the time of their teachers for student access to VHS courses. When a teacher from a school instructs a single course in the VHS network, the school receives a certain number of slots (or “seats”) in any of the courses that the VHS network offers. Therefore, this model allows a school to provide numerous courses to its students in exchange for assigning a single teacher to teach a single VHS course. The online program includes courses, professional development for online teachers, and support services for schools and teachers.

¹ The enrollment figure reflects the total enrollment at the end of the no-penalty drop period. The total enrollment at the end of the add period, but prior to the end of the drop period, was 10,111. The former enrollment figure is used for evaluation purposes because it represents the group of students for which the passing rate is calculated.

VHS Courses

VHS offers courses in nine curriculum areas and four levels. A VHS curriculum coordinator oversees course development to ensure adherence to the following VHS course standards (VHS, n.d.b), which in turn reflect the National Education Association (NEA) course guidelines for high-quality online courses (NEA, n.d.):

- **Instructor led**—The VHS online pedagogy standards call for clear and consistent teacher presence as part of the online course delivery.
- **Student centered**—The VHS design and delivery standards call for an instructional style in which instructors serve as facilitators and educational coaches, designing challenging activities and providing effective guidance and quality feedback to students.
- **Collaborative**—All VHS courses contain small-group activities and team projects for which students must collaborate to foster an online community of learners.
- **Asynchronously scheduled**—To accommodate student schedules and provide optimal flexibility across time zones, all VHS courses are scheduled (students must complete established activities within a given time frame), but courses are scheduled asynchronously so that students can access and work on their courses 24 hours per day, seven days per week.
- **Foster 21st century learning skills**—Online courses should fully utilize the medium to develop effective online communication and interpersonal skills; collaboration and team-building skills; and inventive-thinking skills such as creativity, problem solving, and critical thinking.

The evaluation examined customer satisfaction with course quality in accordance with these standards, with a focus on the topics of course instruction, course content, and student interactions.

VHS Professional Development

VHS provides its teachers with professional development and mentoring to promote effective online facilitation. All new VHS teachers participate in “NetCourse Instructional Methodologies” (NIM), a 10-week course offered via the Internet. Designed to prepare face-to-face classroom teachers to become online course instructors, NIM introduces the pedagogy, methodology, and moderation techniques, along with technical skills, that teachers need to effectively teach an online course (VHS, n.d.b). VHS also offers “Teachers Learning Conference” (TLC), a 22-week course that prepares face-to-face classroom teachers to become online course developers and instructors with VHS. The content of the NIM and TLC courses reflect best practices for online pedagogy (e.g., NEA, n.d.).

During a teacher’s first semester as a facilitator, an expert VHS teacher serves as a mentor, providing a high level of supervision. The role of this mentor is to oversee the quality of facilitation and to provide feedback and support as necessary. Teachers are evaluated at the end of their first semester to determine whether they meet or exceed VHS standards for course

facilitation. Those who do not meet these standards are retained in a high level of supervision for another semester.

VHS Support Services

VHS member schools have several responsibilities related to managing their participation. These include recruiting students, providing guidance to students about what courses to take, and providing time and equipment for students and teachers to work on their VHS courses. Each school designates a local site coordinator to assist with the management of online learning. The site coordinator's responsibilities include registering students into VHS courses, managing course materials for students, monitoring student grades, serving as intermediaries between students and teachers, and reporting student grades to the local school's registrar. VHS supports schools by offering the following services:

- **Site Coordinator Orientation (SCO)**, a four-week online training course for site coordinators to learn VHS policies and procedures and the skills they need to manage online learning at their school.
- **Technical support** (available 24 hours) for both site coordinators and teachers, offered through the Contact Center.
- **Administrative support** for site coordinators for creating and accessing student accounts, filing and obtaining grade reports, and dropping students.
- **Support for teachers**, provided by VHS staff, in handling specific problems with students, site coordinators, and schools.
- **PROGRESS** (PROfessional GRowth ESSentials), a Web-based ongoing professional development system that VHS inaugurated in 2007–08 to help teachers deepen their online teaching skills as well as provide just-in-time training and support to answer teacher questions on technical or course-related issues.
- **SCENE** (Site Coordinator Enrichment Network), a Web-based help system designed to provide ongoing support to VHS site coordinators.

Evaluation Methods

The indicators of program quality are drawn from three sources: (1) VHS programmatic data, encompassing VHS records of school membership in VHS, course registration and grades, and teacher evaluations; (2) annual surveys of superintendents, principals, teachers, and site coordinators, and end-of-semester student surveys; (3) participation and passing rates for students in Advanced Placement (AP) courses, as reported by VHS member schools. These data sources are the basis for the following specific measures (additional detail regarding each source is provided in the body of the report):

- Indicators of VHS growth
 - Growth in student enrollment
 - Growth in VHS school membership and retention of member schools
 - Utilization of available student seats

- Growth in course offerings and course sections
- Indicators of course and instructional quality
 - Course passing rates (overall and for credit recovery classes)
 - AP testing outcomes: number of students taking and passing AP exams
 - Customer ratings aligned with standards for course quality: course instruction, course content, and student interactions
 - Customer satisfaction with course quality and student learning
- Professional development quality
 - Customer ratings of effectiveness of VHS professional development NetCourses and VHS mentoring
 - Percentage of teachers retained in high level of faculty advising
 - New teacher success rate
- Program and services quality
 - Customer ratings of benefits and feasibility of participation
 - Customer ratings of VHS support and communication

VHS Extant Programmatic Data

VHS compiled all indicators based on extant programmatic data, covering the most recently concluded program year and extending back as far as data were available for each indicator. In addition to this summary, VHS provided the evaluator with the raw data files upon which the indicators were calculated. Evaluation staff examined data files for irregularities (e.g., missing data, out-of-range values, and inconsistent identifiers) and verified the process by which VHS calculated each indicator. In cases where evaluation staff arrived at final figures that were discrepant from those reported in the VHS summary, these discrepancies were resolved by discussion.

Customer Surveys

VHS developed its own customer surveys in reference to the topic areas of educational quality, professional development quality, and service quality. VHS administered these customer surveys each semester to students and each year to teachers, principals, site coordinators, and superintendents. All surveys were administered online, although VHS sent paper copies of surveys to principals and superintendents who did not complete their online survey. The response rates for the 2007–08 surveys are reported in Table 1. Teachers had the highest response rate at 50 percent, and superintendents had the lowest response rate (12 percent).

A reasonable explanation for the low response rates among principals and superintendents is that they may feel the responsibility for offering opinions about the program rests with those staff who are most involved with it at their school, namely, teachers and site coordinators. Therefore,

those who replied may represent those who have the strongest opinions about the program or who feel the strongest personal responsibility for their school's or district's participation.

Table 1. Survey Response Rates by Respondent Category (2007–08)

Respondents	Sent (N)	Received (N)	Response Rate
Teachers	271	136	50.2%
Site coordinators	660	228	35.5%
Principals	419	93	22.2%
Superintendents	313	39	12.5%
Students	9,186	2,183	23.8%

Note. Student response rates were based on a combination of surveys administered in the fall and spring semesters.

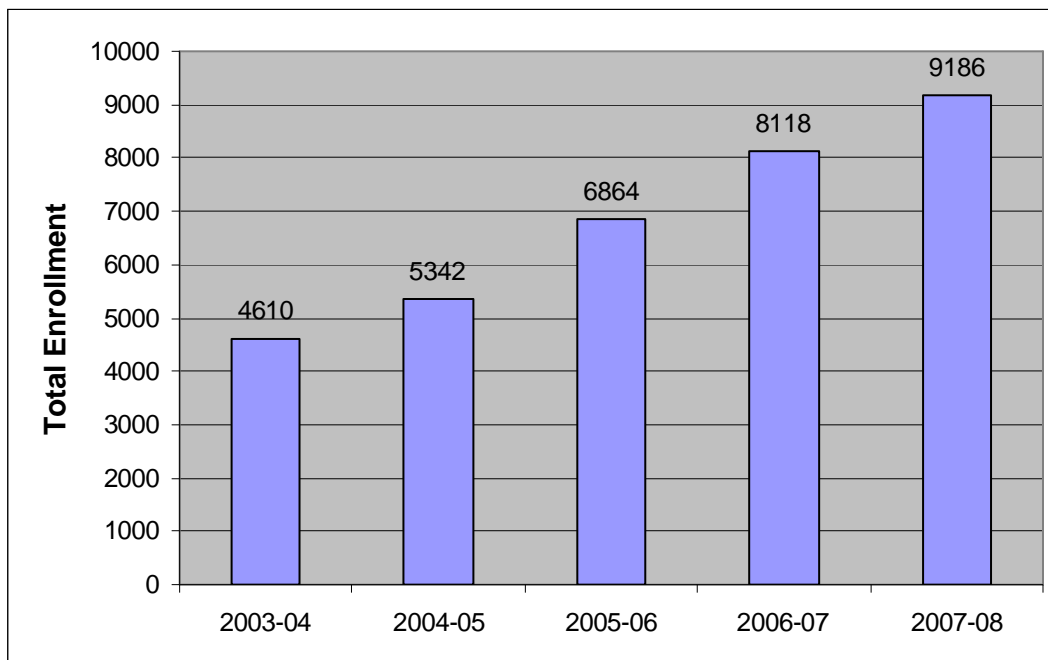
Survey Analysis Procedures. Surveys were analyzed descriptively by displaying frequency of response for each item. The student survey responses from the fall and spring semesters were aggregated into a single analysis file. It is important to note that numerous items asked for opinions about VHS services and other aspects of the program with which numerous respondents may not have been familiar (e.g., the Contact Center or the PROGRESS website). When calculating the response frequencies, the evaluation staff removed from the denominator those respondents who reported that they were not aware of these services.

VHS Growth in Membership, Enrollment, and Offerings

The rate of growth of the VHS program is presented first because it is the most fundamental of all measures of program quality. In particular, the growth of the program reflects the satisfaction of customers with the program and its feasibility for schools. VHS growth is measured in terms of member schools, student enrollment, and course offerings. During the 2007–08 school year, enrollment in VHS courses continued to increase over previous years, as displayed in Figure 1.

- There were 9,186 students enrolled at the end of the no-penalty drop period in 2007–08, a 12 percent increase from the previous year.²
- The rate of growth was somewhat less than the previous year, when enrollment grew by 18 percent over 2005–06.
- The total enrollment is approximately double what it was four years ago (2003–04).

Figure 1. Total Student Enrollment, Across Years



Growth in Membership

Growth in membership is tracked with the number of member schools, their annual retention rates, and the extent to which they are utilizing their membership. Overall, school membership has increased steadily in the past three years (see Figure 2). In 2007–08, there were 480 schools affiliated with VHS, a 13 percent increase from 2006–07.³ As highlighted in Table 2, this rate of growth is comparable to the previous year but substantially less than the growth from 2004–05 to 2005–06.

² There were 10,111 students enrolled at the end of the add period, as mentioned in the previous footnote.

³ The number of schools reflects a particular point in time, namely, the beginning of the school year.

The VHS program in 2007–08 retained about 84 percent of schools that had participated during the previous year. This is a slight decrease in retention from previous years (see Table 2).

Figure 2. Number of New and Retained Member Schools, Across Years

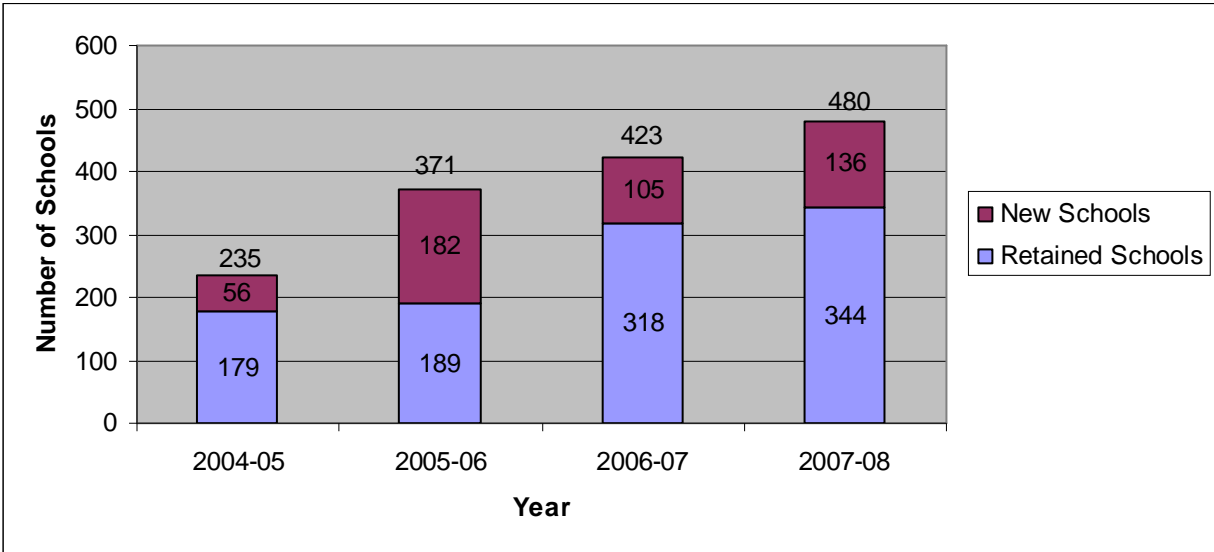


Table 2. Retention of VHS Member Schools, Across Years

School Year	Total Schools at Start of Academic Year	Increase From Previous Year	Total Schools Dropped From Previous Year	Retention Rate
2004–05	235	18%	21	91.1%
2005–06	371	58%	46	87.6%
2006–07	423	14%	53	87.5%
2007–08	480	13%	79	83.5%

Membership utilization is the extent to which member schools use their allotted seats in VHS courses. It is expressed by the ratio of total seats used by member schools to the total number of seats allocated.⁴ This ratio has remained at 67 percent for the past two years, the only years for which data are currently available (see Table 3).

Table 3. Membership Utilization

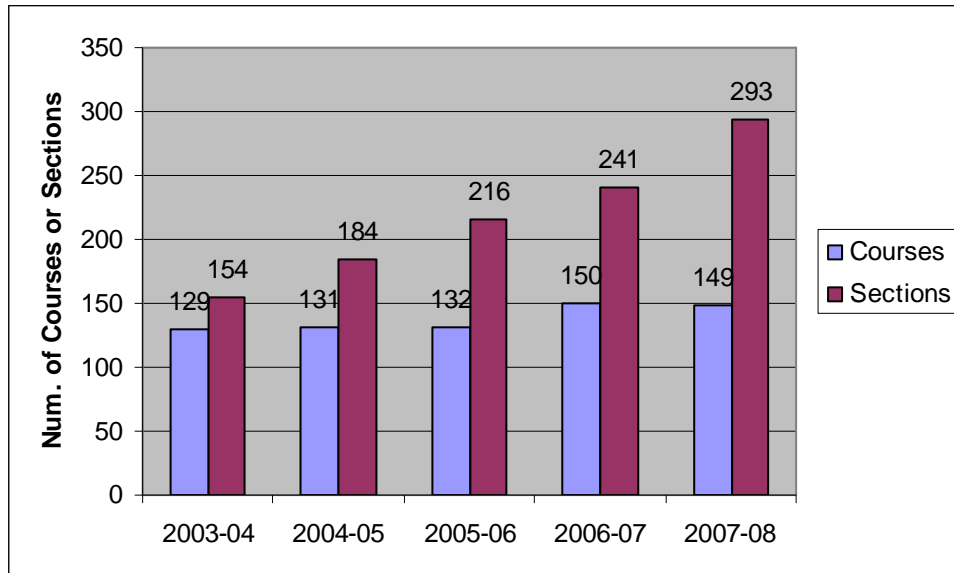
School Year	Total Used	Total Allocated	Percentage Utilized
2006–07	7,417	11,104	67%
2007–08	8,370	12,486	67%

⁴ Because not all enrolled students are affiliated with schools with membership agreements, the total number of seats used does not equal the total enrollment for a given year.

Growth in Course Offerings

In 2006–07, VHS offered 149 unique courses, about the same as the year before. The number of course sections increased to 293, up by 22 percent from the previous year. Figure 3 displays the growth in courses and sections.

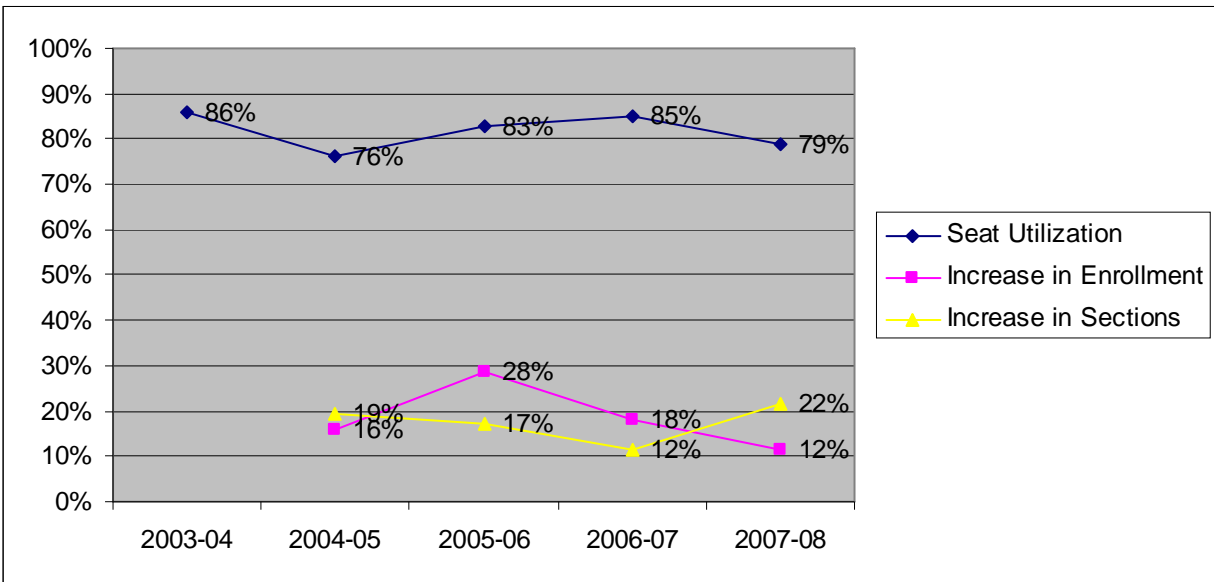
Figure 3. Number of VHS Courses and Course Sections, Across Years



In light of the increase in the number of course sections, it is useful to examine the proportion of all seats that were filled by students.⁵ As shown in Figure 4, the rate of seat utilization has fluctuated over the past five years, reflecting the interplay between increases in enrollment and number of course sections.

⁵ This figure differs from membership utilization, which focuses on the use of seats allotted to member schools.

Figure 4. Seat Utilization and Percentage Change in Enrollment and Sections, Across Years



Summary of VHS Program Growth

The VHS program has grown in terms of enrollment, membership, and capacity. Enrollments in VHS courses grew at a rate of 12 percent in 2007–08, with a total enrollment of 9,186. School membership has increased steadily over the past three years, although the retention rate for mentor schools decreased slightly in 2007–08. VHS continues to offer the same number of courses, although the number of course sections has increased by 22 percent.

Course Quality

VHS course quality is evaluated in terms of passing rates (overall and for credit recovery in particular), AP testing results for students in AP courses, and customer evaluations of the adherence to course standards and for overall satisfaction with courses and student learning. Together, these indicators address the evaluation question, “Are the rigor and quality of VHS courses and professional development sufficiently high?”

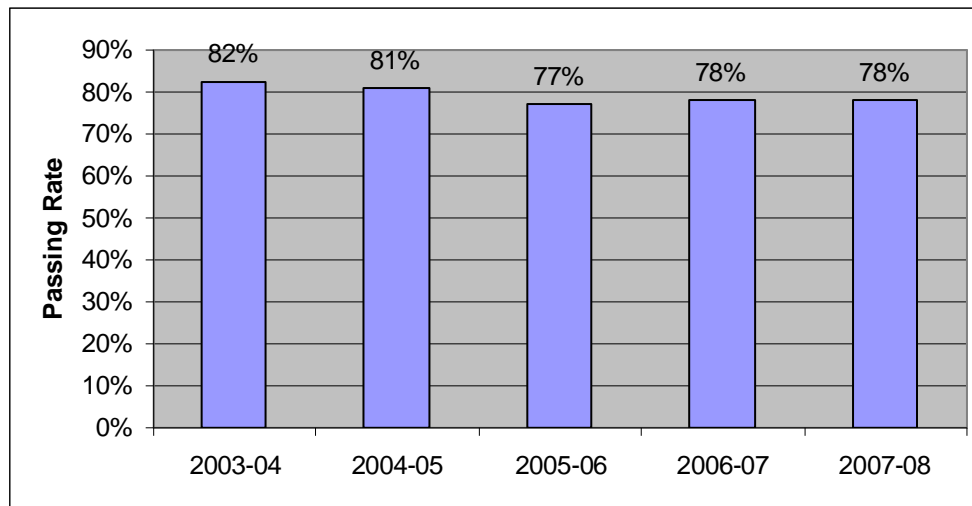
It must be acknowledged that the passing rates in VHS courses are not direct measures of course quality, given that an excellent course and a mediocre course may have identical passing rates. However, changes in the overall passing rates may call attention to fluctuations in course quality that may need to be examined through other methods. For this reason, they are included here.

Passing Rates

The passing rate for a given VHS course is the proportion of students who achieve a grade of at least “D” (60 percent or greater). Students who withdrew from the course after the no-penalty drop period or with a grade of “Incomplete” were counted toward the denominator of the passing rate.

The overall course passing rates have remained consistently high over the past five years and stood at about 78 percent for the 2007–08 school year (see Figure 5).

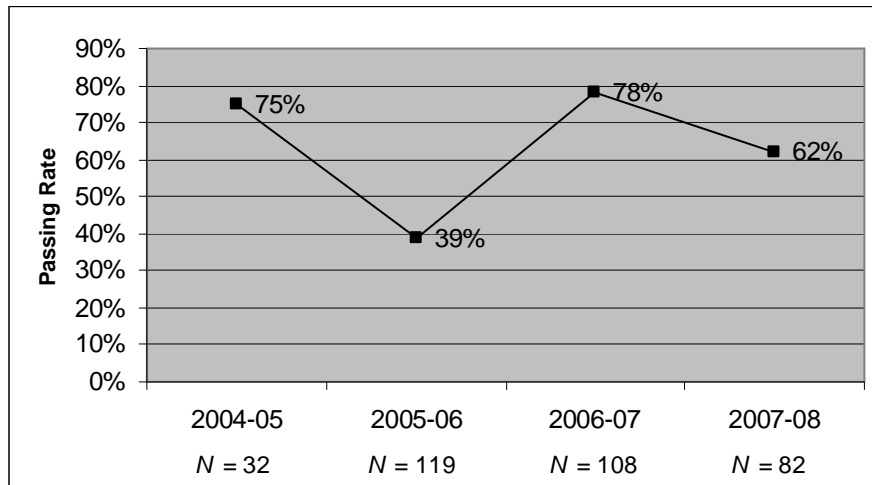
Figure 5. Overall VHS Course Passing Rate, Across Years



Note. The passing rate is the ratio of students earning a D or higher to the total number of students enrolled after the no-penalty drop deadline.

Students taking VHS summer courses may elect to take the course for credit recovery. In the summer of 2007, 82 of 84 summer school students elected the credit recovery option; 51 of these students earned credit, for a success rate of 62 percent. The historical trend in the credit recovery success rate is depicted in Figure 6, which indicates that this rate continues to fluctuate. Moreover, the number of students in credit recovery courses has declined for the past two years.

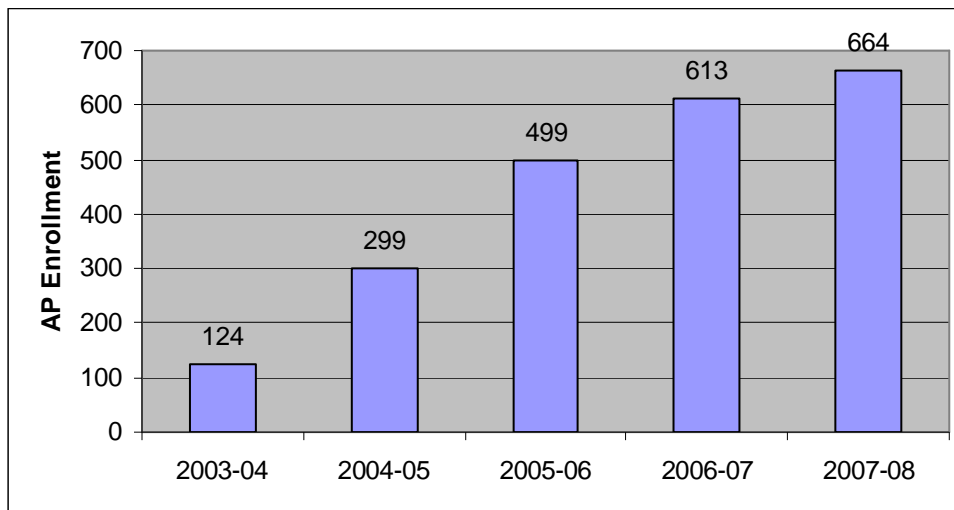
Figure 6. Credit Recovery Success Rate, Across Years



AP Testing Outcomes

In 2007–08, there were 664 students enrolled in AP courses through VHS, a modest increase (8 percent) over the previous year (see Figure 7). This change indicates that the increase in enrollment in AP courses has somewhat leveled off after increases of 23 percent and 66 percent over the previous two years.

Figure 7. Total Enrollment in AP Courses, Across Years



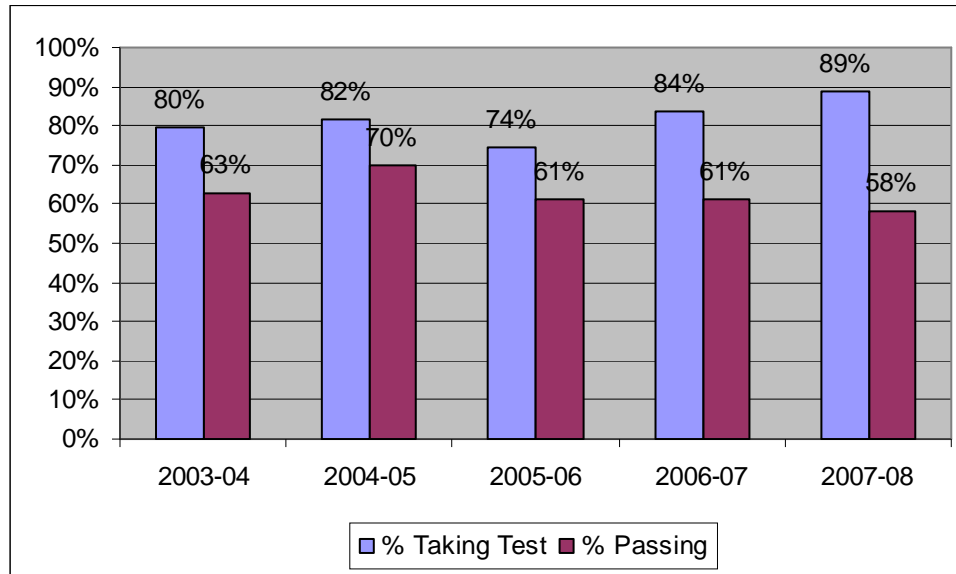
Two test outcomes are tracked for AP students: whether the students took the test and whether they passed it. Out of 664 students taking AP courses, VHS successfully tracked test outcomes for 584 students (88 percent), as follows (see also Figure 8):

- The proportion of students taking the AP test rose to 89 percent in 2007–08, by far the highest proportion of test takers since the expansion of AP course offerings in 2003–04.

- The proportion of students passing the exam (out of those taking the exam) decreased slightly to 58 percent from 61 percent the previous two years and from 70 percent in 2004–05.

These two findings may be related. It is possible that this decrease reflects the successful effort in encouraging students to take the exam even if they were not confident in their ability to pass it.

Figure 8. Percentage of Students Enrolled in AP Courses Taking and Passing the AP Test

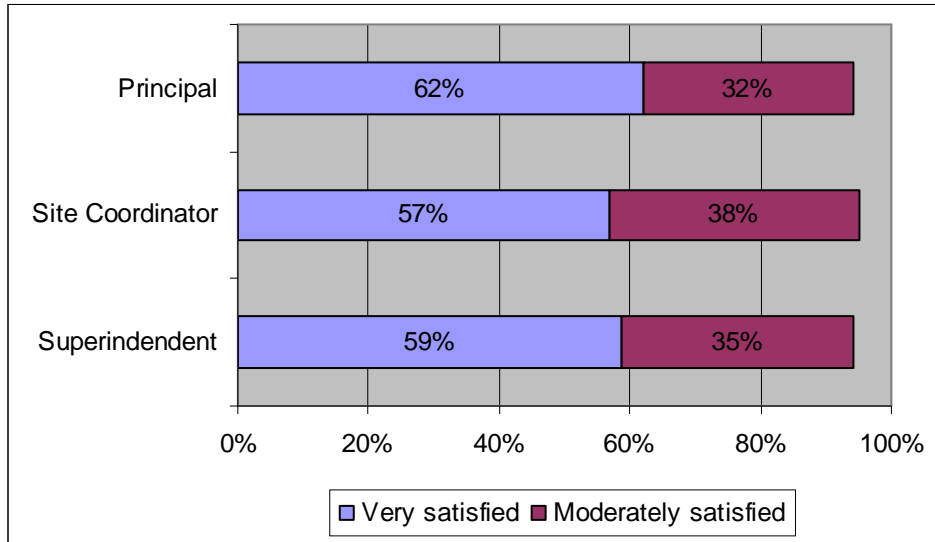


Satisfaction With Course Quality and Student Learning

This section reports the level of satisfaction with course quality and student learning as conveyed by superintendents, principals, site coordinators, VHS teachers, and VHS students on customer surveys.

Superintendents, principals, and site coordinators completed customer surveys and rated their overall level of satisfaction with VHS courses. The response options for these items were *very satisfied*, *moderately satisfied*, *somewhat satisfied*, *slightly or not satisfied*, and *don't know/no opinion*. As shown in Figure 9, the vast majority of respondents were very satisfied or moderately satisfied with VHS courses.

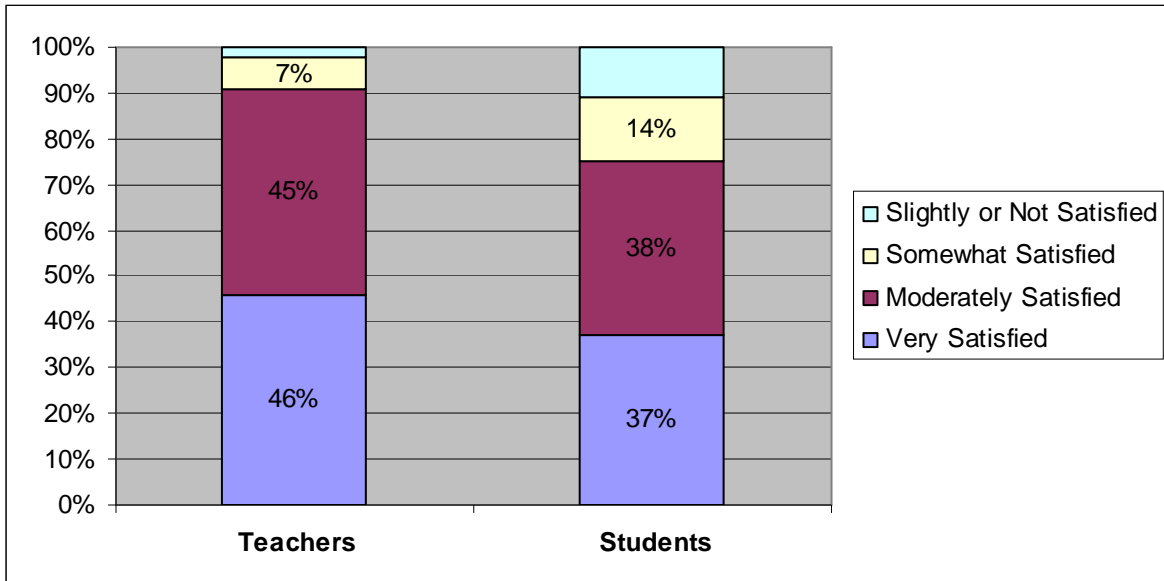
Figure 9. Rating of Satisfaction With VHS Courses by Role



Note. Principal $N = 87$; site coordinator $N = 221$; superintendent $N = 34$. The N for each excludes respondents who selected *don't know/no opinion*.

VHS students and teachers rated their satisfaction with the quality of the course they had taken or taught. The overall satisfactions ratings are presented in Figure 10. Approximately 75 percent of students and 88 percent of teachers were *moderately* or *very satisfied* with the quality of their VHS course.⁶ Only 11 percent of students and 2 percent of teachers were *slightly* or *not satisfied*.

Figure 10. Student ($N = 2,004$) and Teacher ($N = 122$) Ratings of Satisfaction With Course Quality



Note. The 2 percent of students who selected *don't know/no opinion* are excluded from the denominator.

⁶ Eleven teachers selected the short answer option for this item rather than making a rating. Based on a qualitative analysis of their responses, these teachers were assigned to a rating category.

Student respondents were invited to describe in open-ended fashion what they “liked best” about their course. A total of 1,414 students provided some comment. Their comments indicated that the students liked the course because of exposure to other types of students, the scheduling flexibility, and the ability to take classes that were not offered at their normal high schools. The following are representative student quotes about the aspects of the course they liked best:

- *I liked being able to “talk” to people from around the world without seeing them in person.*
- *Freedom to do work when I had time.*
- *I just liked the fact that I was able to take a class online that wasn’t offered in my school.*

Students also were asked to describe what could help improve the quality of VHS courses. In response, 440 students provided comments. Other than course-level complaints, some students found online learning (especially math and foreign language) not to fit with their learning styles. In addition, students with time management or self-motivation struggles found the lack of structure to be problematic. The following quotes represent student responses about how to improve VHS courses:

- *I really struggled with this class. I don’t know if it was just that it was a foreign language online and it’s difficult for me to learn this way, but I feel that I could not do some of the assignments nor could I be helped on them.*
- *It was sometimes hard working with students in different grade levels and from different locations, when they couldn’t all be online during the same time frame.*
- *Once I began to fall behind, it became impossible to catch up, and the notes given to me by the teacher often times, after the first semester, did little to help clarify the material. This is honestly a class that should be given solely to kids of an extremely high independent learning competency. (AP Statistics student)*

Ratings of Student Learning Experiences

Teachers and students rated their impressions of the quality of student learning in their course. VHS teachers responded to items regarding whether their students learned a lot in their course, gained an understanding of key concepts, were highly engaged in the class, and were motivated to do their best (see Figure 11). Almost all teachers *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that students “learned a lot in this course” and gained a “deeper understanding of important concepts” (98 percent, respectively). Most teachers felt that students were highly engaged and motivated (about 90 percent, respectively).

Students rated the same items as the teachers, although phrased in the first person. Once again, student ratings of their learning experiences were lower than the corresponding ratings of their teachers (see Figure 12). Most students *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that they learned a lot in the course (86 percent) and gained understanding of important concepts (86 percent). About three fourths of students reported being highly engaged and motivated by their course.

Figure 11. Teachers' Agreement With Statements About Student Learning

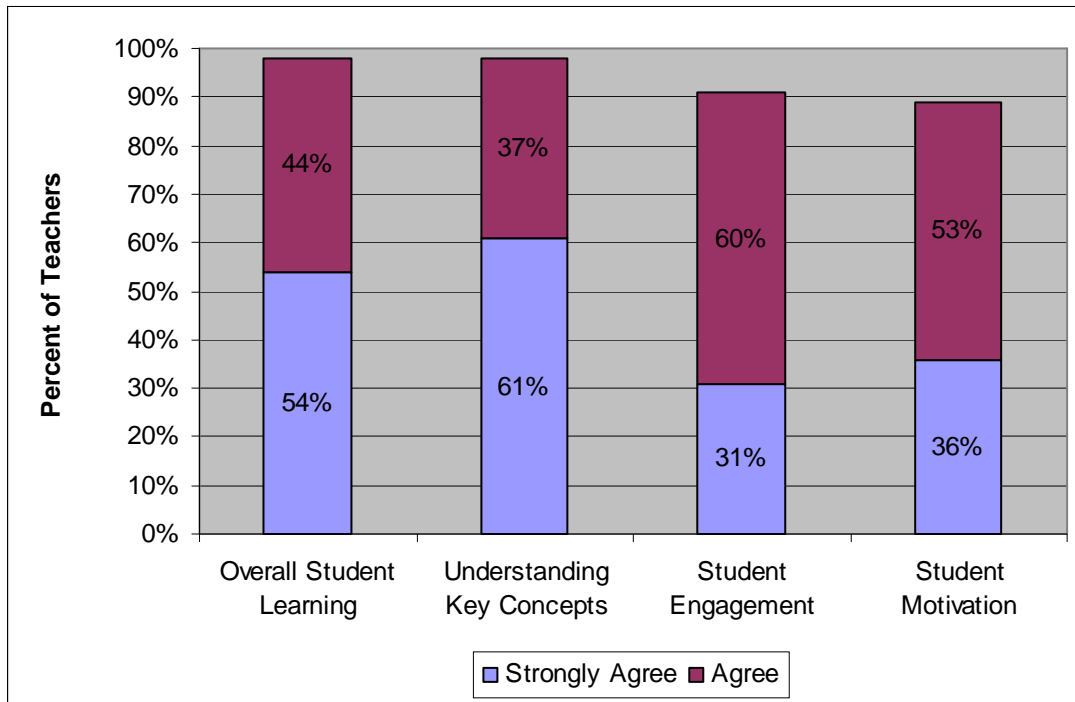
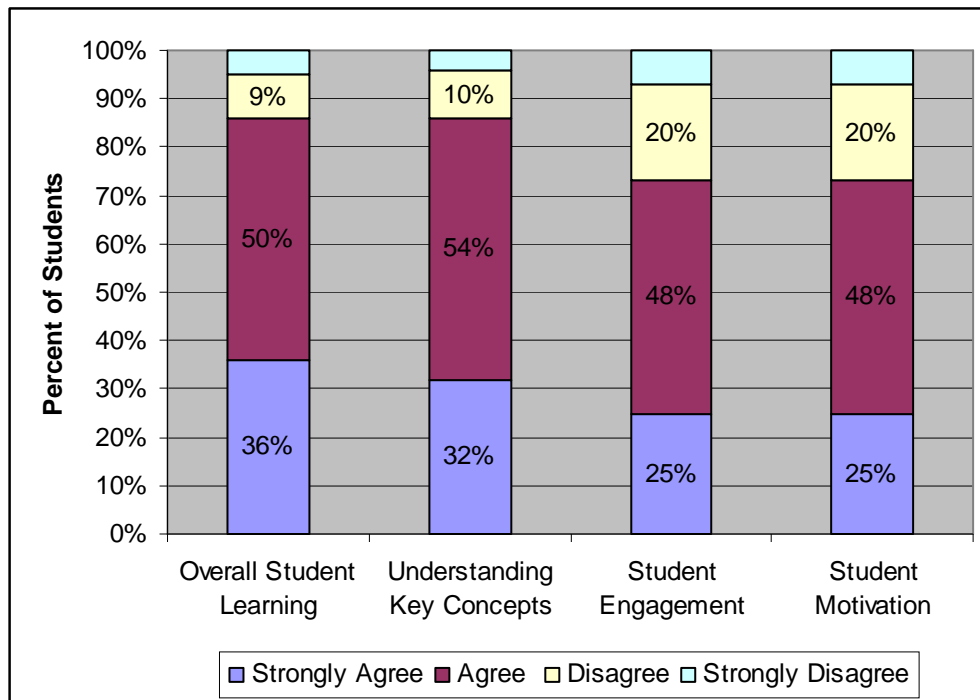


Figure 12. Students' Agreement With Statements About Student Learning



Customer Ratings of Course Quality

In alignment with VHS standards for course quality, teachers and students rated several statements about course instruction, course content, and student interactions. These ratings are presented in three respective sections.

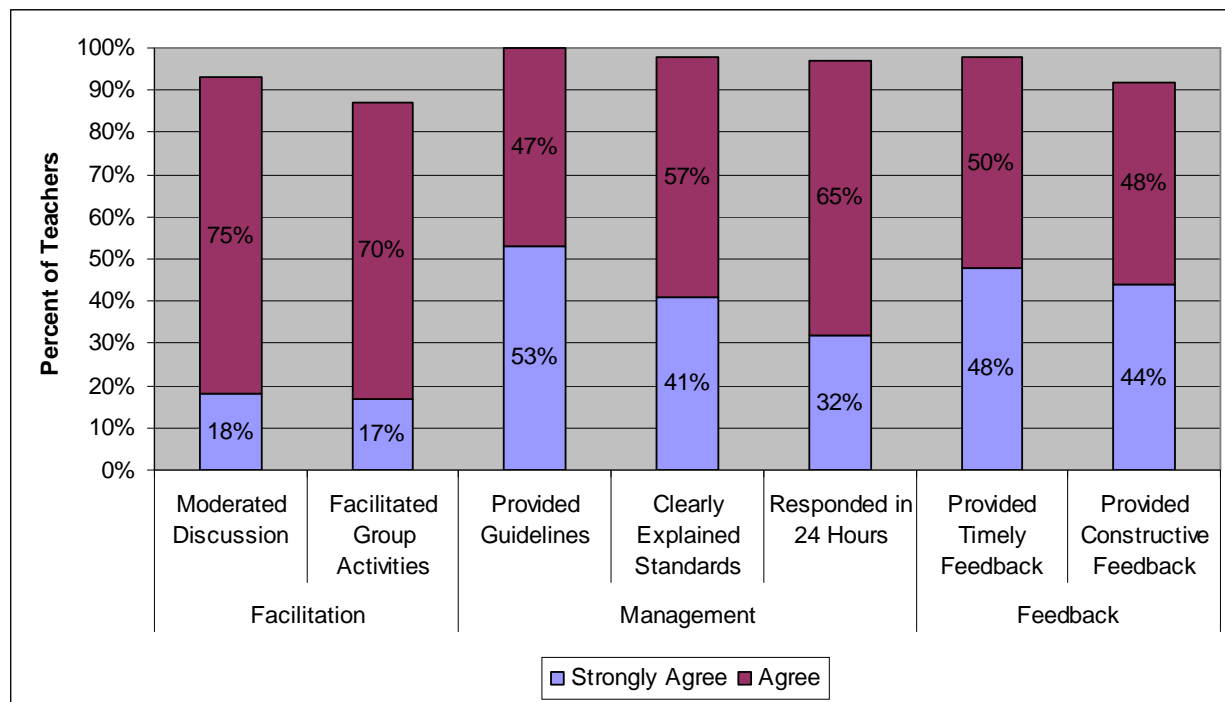
Customer Ratings of Course Instruction

Effective course facilitation is a central component of the VHS vision for online learning. Student and teacher surveys asked respondents to rate statements describing the level of course facilitation, as indicated by items on communication, facilitation, and instructor availability.

When surveyed about their instructional practice in the areas of course facilitation, class management, and their provision of feedback, teachers' levels of agreement varied by survey item (see Figure 13). Overall, teachers agreed most strongly with statements about course management, that is, that they provided students with guidelines about how to engage in discussions, that they answered questions within 24 hours, and that they clearly explained the grading standards for assignments. Most instructors *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that they moderated class discussions effectively and that they facilitated group activities effectively, although fewer instructors *strongly agreed* with these items about facilitation than with items about course management and feedback.

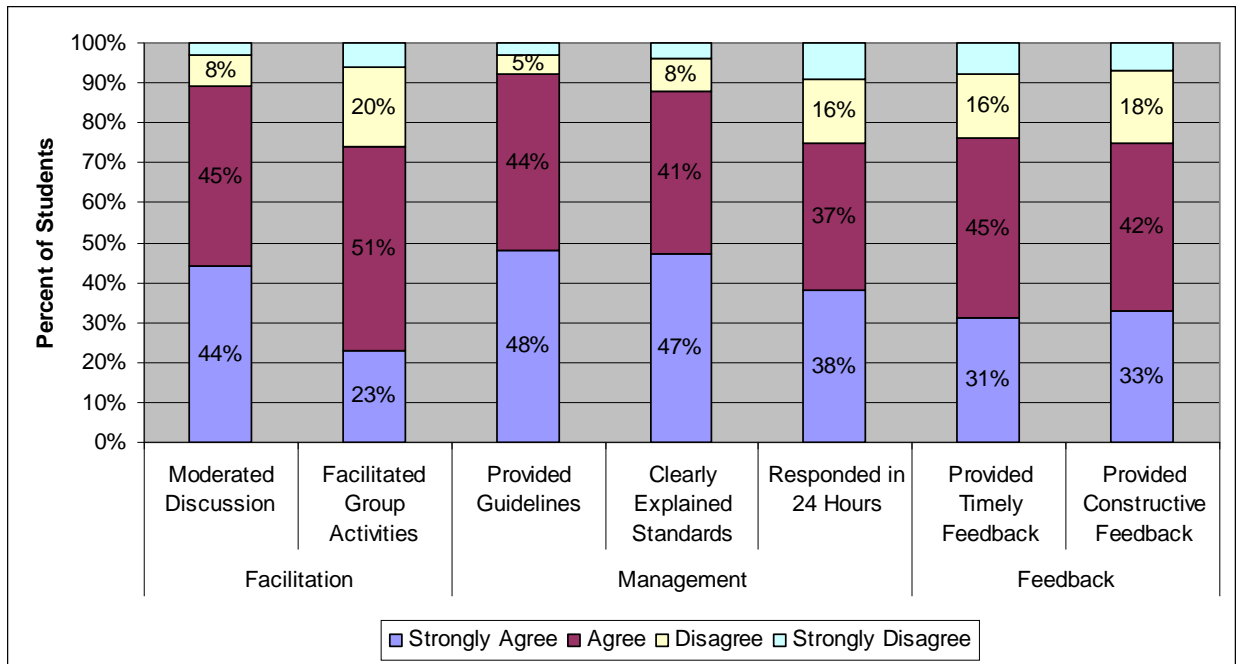
These trends are consistent with the data from the 2006–2007 report; however, overall, the ratings were higher than last year. Almost all teachers (98 percent) *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that they provided timely feedback, which was up from the 82 percent of the previous year.

Figure 13. Levels of Teacher Agreement With Statements About Instructional Practice (N = 122)



Students generally rated statements about instruction lower than teachers on the same survey items (see Figure 14). While 87 percent of teachers *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that they facilitated group activities, only 74 percent of students *agreed* or *strongly agreed*. Most students agreed that their teachers were effective at moderating discussion (89 percent *agree* or *strongly agree*), that they provided guidelines (92 percent), and clearly explained standards (88 percent). Three fourths of students were content with the teachers’ abilities to respond within 24 hours, provide timely feedback, and provide constructive feedback.

Figure 14. Levels of Student Agreement With Statements About Instructional Practice



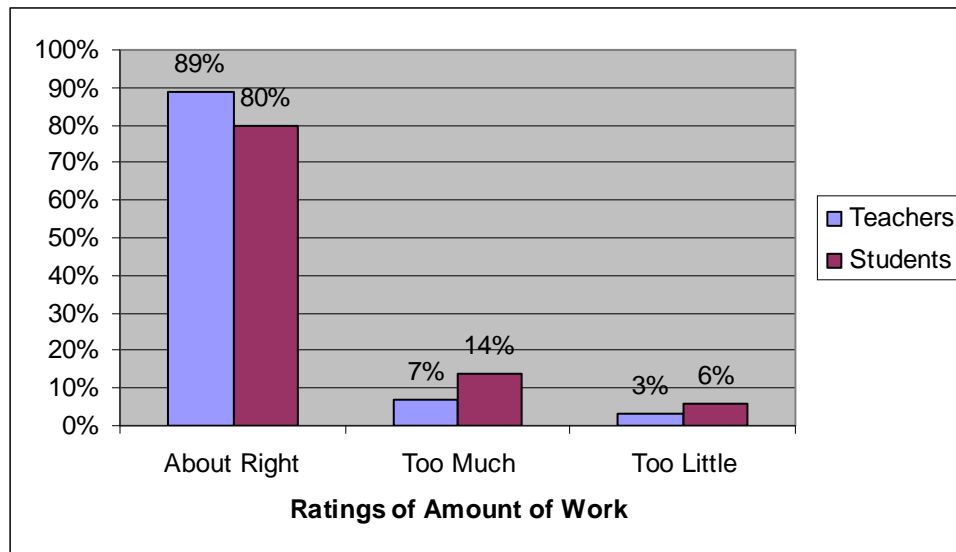
Note. The Ns ranged from 1,941 to 2,066 because of respondents answering *not applicable*.

Customer Ratings of Course Content

This section reports the ratings of students and teachers regarding course content.

Students and teachers were asked whether the amount of work in the course was *about right*, *too much*, or *too little*. as Figure 15 indicates, most teachers (89 percent) and students (80 percent) felt that the workload was about right.

Figure 15. Student (N = 2,077) and Teacher (N = 122) Ratings of Statements About Amount of Work Assigned

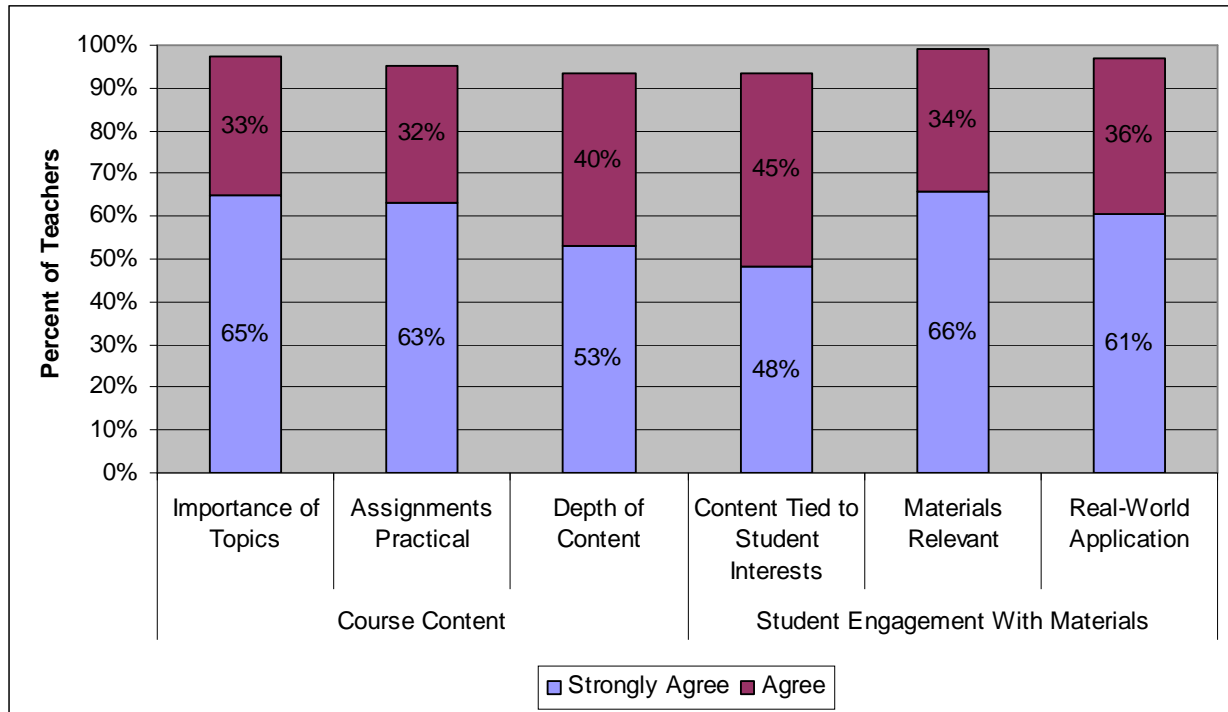


Students and teachers rated their level of agreement with several statements about the course content. These included the importance of topics covered and whether assignments were practical and covered in depth. Respondents also rated several statements about how engaging the material was, referring to its real-world applicability, relevance, and connection with student interests.

As shown in Figure 16, teachers approach the content of their course in a number of ways. Nearly two thirds of teachers surveyed *strongly agreed* that the content of their course covered important topics and that the course assignments involved practical applications of knowledge or of skills. In addition, 97 percent of teachers *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that students had the opportunity to connect the course topics to real-world situations, and all teachers felt that the materials and readings associated with the course furthered student understanding of course content.

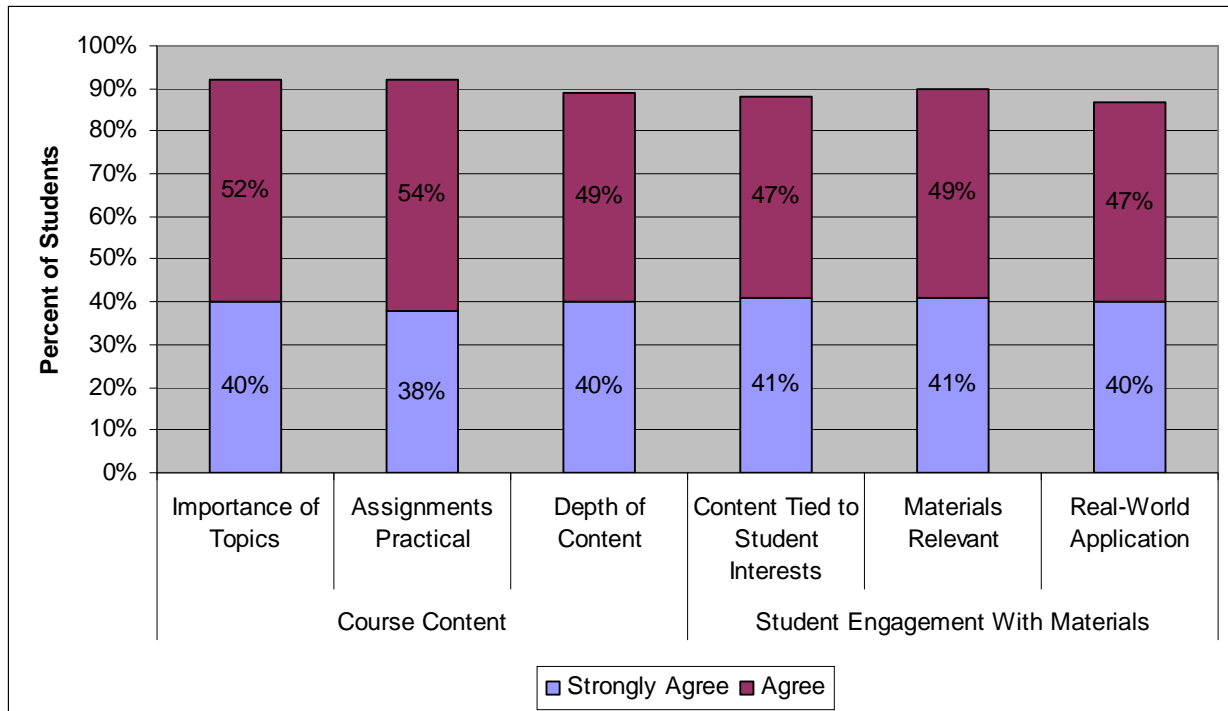
Teacher ratings of statements about course content were very similar to responses from the 2006–07 academic year.

Figure 16. Level of Teachers Agreement With Statements About Course Content (N = 122)



Although students rated course content somewhat lower than teachers, their ratings were very high. About 90 percent *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with each item related to course content (see Figure 17). Students rated course content slightly higher than student engagement with materials.

Figure 17. Level of Student Agreement With Statements About Course Content (N = 2,077)



Customer Ratings of Student Participation

The final area of course quality rated by students and teachers is the extent of student interactions within VHS courses. Students and teachers rated their agreement with statements about student discussions and group work, with two statements corresponding to each topic. The survey items differed somewhat in accordance with the perspective of the two groups of respondents.

Use of Discussion Boards. There was strong agreement that student discussions are of high quality and frequent, although teachers tended to agree to a greater extent than students. Specific findings are as follows (see also Figures 18 and 19):

- Most teachers (81 percent) *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that students participated in high-quality discussions. Similarly, about 70 percent of students *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that these discussions promoted their understanding of course concepts.
- Eighty-seven percent of teachers *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that students frequently used the discussion boards to discuss course content, and 71 percent of students *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that they frequently interacted via the discussion boards.

Group Work. Opinions were decidedly more mixed on this item. In general, teachers perceived student group work as more important than did the students, although the items on the respective surveys were not directly comparable. Specific findings are as follows (see Figures 18 and 19):

- More than three fourths of teachers *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that group projects were an important part of their class. By contrast, just over half of students *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that group projects promoted their understanding of course subject matter.
- Regarding the effectiveness of collaboration, 56 percent of teachers *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that students worked effectively on group projects. Similarly, 60 percent of students agreed that group work promoted a sense of a classroom community.

Figure 18. Level of Teacher Agreement With Statements About Student Participation (N = 122)

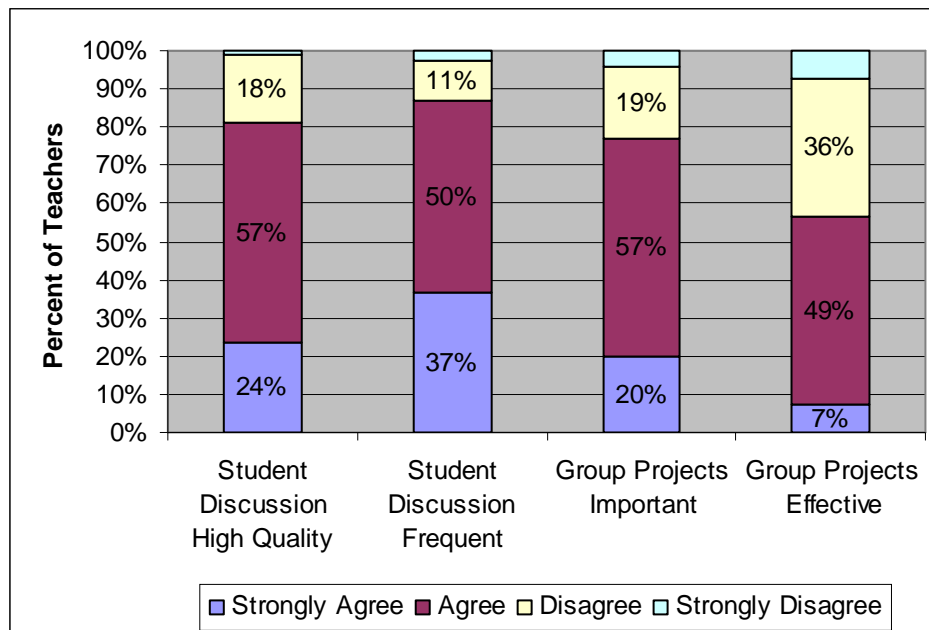
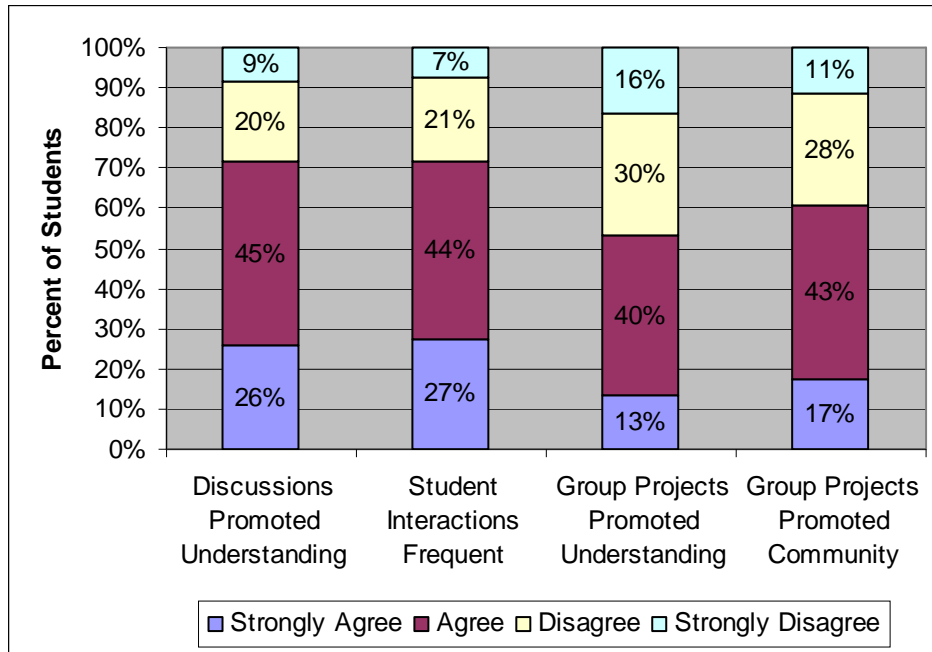


Figure 19. Level of Student Agreement With Statements About Student Participation (N = 2,077)



Summary of Course Quality

Course passing rates have remained steady overall, but the credit recovery success rate continues to fluctuate. The number of students enrolled in AP courses and the proportion of such students taking their AP exam increased during the past two years. The proportion of students passing their AP test dropped slightly and now stands at 58 percent. Overall satisfaction with VHS courses is high. Moreover, most teachers and students agreed that these courses are educationally valuable. Most teachers perceived high levels of student engagement and motivation in their classes, and the large majority of students themselves agreed that they were highly engaged and motivated to do their best. Teachers and students provided feedback on the extent to which their course reflected VHS standards for course instruction, content, and student interactions. Course instruction was rated high by both types of respondents, except in regards to facilitation of group work. Similarly, students and teachers rated the quality and level of student interactions high—when considering student discussions, but not when considering group work. Finally, both types of respondents rated course content high and agreed that the amount of work was appropriate.

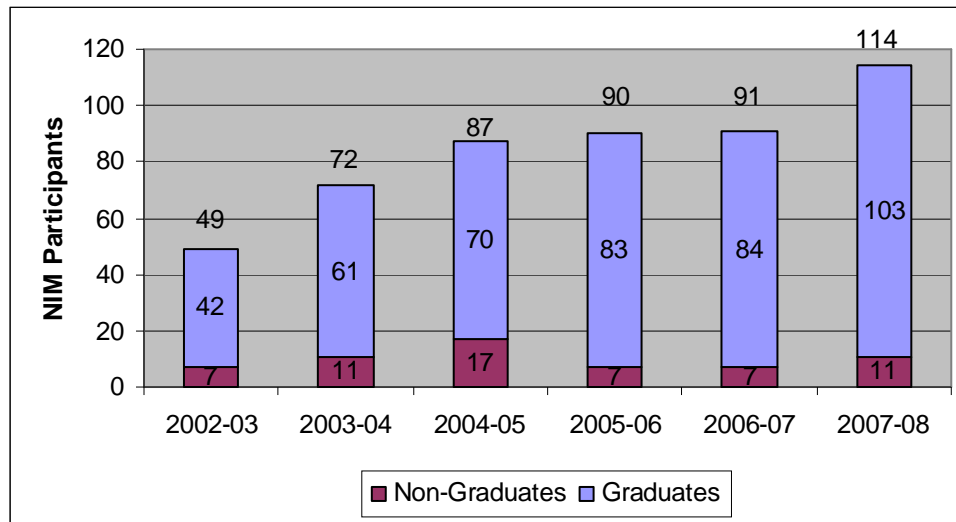
Professional Development Quality

There are several indicators of the quality of the professional development offered by VHS. These include the passing rate for “NetCourse Instructional Methodologies” (NIM) and “Teachers Learning Conference” (TLC) courses, the proportion of teachers retained in mentoring after their first semester of teaching, ratings of effectiveness of NIM, and ratings of effectiveness of mentoring.

Professional Development Course Quality

The graduation rate for the NIM and TLC professional development courses has remained steady for the past three years, with 90 percent graduating in 2007–08 and 92 percent graduating in each of the previous two years. The number of teachers participating in VHS NetCourses (NIM and TLC, combined) increased to 114 in 2007–08, a 25 percent increase over the previous year (see Figure 20).

Figure 20. Total Participants in Professional Development Courses (Graduates and Non-Graduates), Across Years

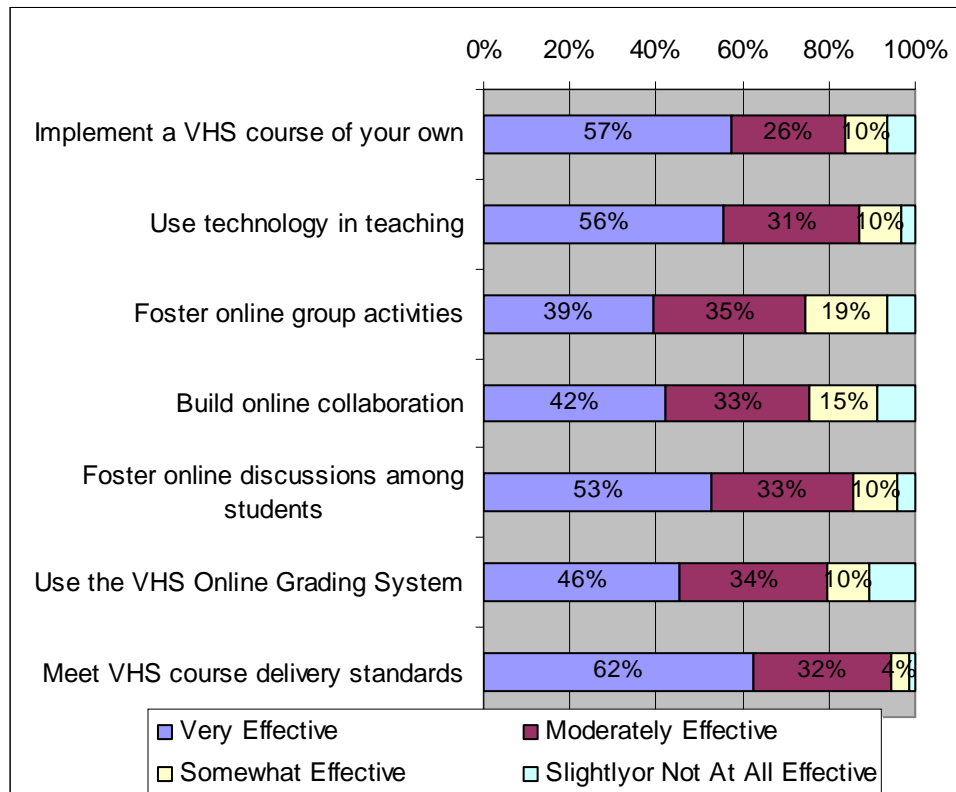


Customer Ratings of Professional Development Quality. All teachers were asked to rate the effectiveness of their professional development NetCourse (NIM or TLC) in preparing them for a variety of online teaching tasks. These findings are summarized in Figure 21 and as follows:

- The typical rating for all of these items was *very effective*, with at least three fourths or more of teachers rating the course at least *moderately effective*.
- These ratings are slightly but consistently higher than the previous year across all items. The most notable increase was for “Use the VHS Online Grading System,” for which 80 percent rated the NetCourse as at least moderately effective compared with 63 percent last year.

- Teachers rated the professional development most effective for preparing them to do the following: “Meet VHS course delivery standards,” “Use technology in teaching,” and “Implement a VHS course of your own.”
- The relatively lowest ratings were for “Build online collaboration” and “Foster online discussions among students,” although the effectiveness was still rated high in absolute terms. This finding corresponds to the somewhat lower ratings for student interactions discussed in the Customer Ratings of Course Quality section of this report.

Figure 21. Ratings of Effectiveness of Professional Development Courses, Across Years



Note. For these items, *N* ranged from 123 to 125, except for the first item (“Implement a VHS course of your own”), where *N* = 110.

In summary, the participation in professional development has increased while the graduation rate has remained steady. Teachers typically perceive the courses as *moderately effective* to *very effective* relative to a variety of facilitation skills, and these ratings are more positive than the previous year’s ratings.

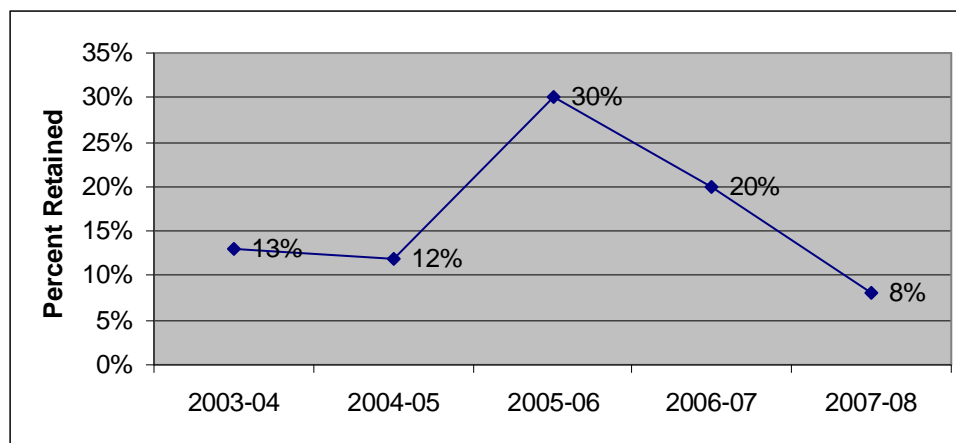
Mentoring Quality

All VHS teachers in their first semester of teaching are assigned a mentor to assist them with the new experience of online teaching. VHS mentors submit regular evaluations of their mentees to the VHS education programs coordinator. Based on these evaluations, the mentor and education programs coordinator decide whether teachers need to continue to be monitored by a mentor

during the subsequent semester. If so, that teacher is considered to have been retained in mentoring. Figure 22 illustrates the proportion of teachers retained in mentoring from the 2003–04 school year through the 2007–08 school year. The following inferences can be drawn:

- During the 2007–08 school year, the percentage of teachers retained in mentoring dropped to its lowest level (8 percent) over the past five years, down considerably from a high of 30 percent during the 2005–06 school year.
- When one looks solely at new VHS teachers (and not other teachers who have been retained previously in mentoring), 90 percent successfully completed their first semester without needing to be retained in mentoring. This is comparable to the 89 percent success rate for new teachers in 2006–07 (the first year for which this statistic was kept).

Figure 22. Percentage of Teachers Retained in Mentoring, Across Years



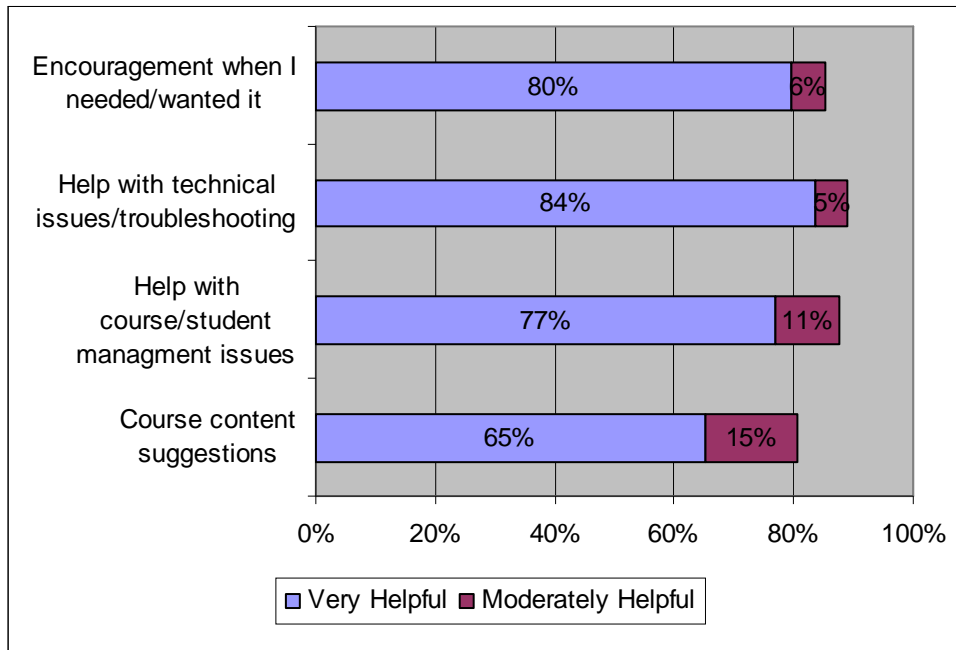
In summary, it appears that VHS teacher training is adequately preparing most teachers for online instruction.

Teacher Ratings of Mentoring Quality

Respondents to the teacher survey who indicated they had taught one to two semesters of a VHS course (and who therefore had recently worked with a mentor) were asked to rate the effectiveness of their mentor.

In general, these ratings were very positive, as displayed in Figure 23. For each aspect of the mentor’s role, teachers typically described their mentor as *very helpful*. At least 80 percent rated the mentor at least *moderately helpful* for each item. Ratings were uniformly high for giving encouragement, helping with troubleshooting, and helping with course or student management. Although still very positive, teachers were somewhat less positive regarding the helpfulness of course content suggestions. Overall, these ratings are slightly yet consistently more positive than the previous year’s ratings.

Figure 23. Ratings of Mentor Helpfulness



Note. For these items, *N* ranged from 54 to 56, except for “Course content suggestions,” where *N* = 46.

In summary, VHS teachers typically rated their mentors as *very helpful*, and these ratings are more positive than the previous year.

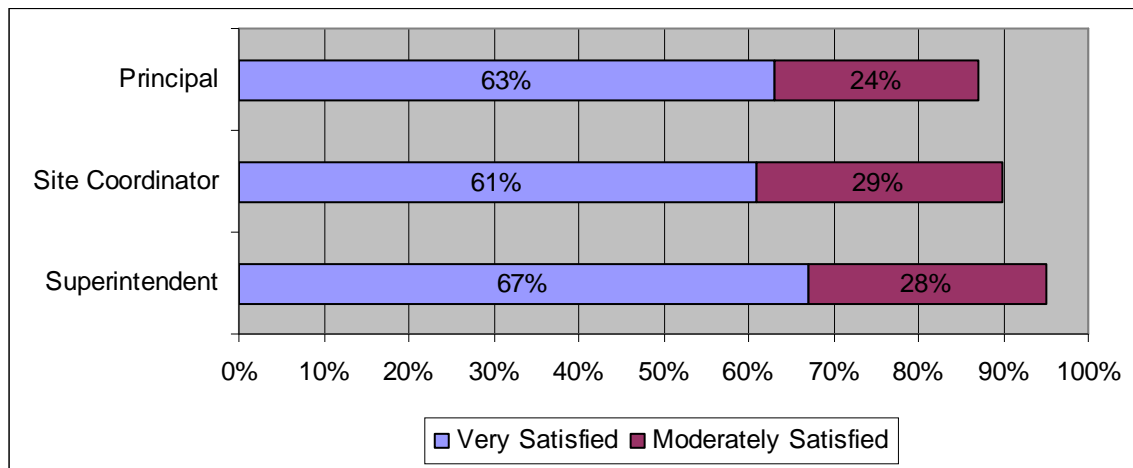
Benefits and Feasibility of Participation

This section presents findings on the benefits of VHS participation for schools, teachers, and students, as well as the feasibility of this participation. These findings address two of the evaluation’s questions: “Is VHS feasible for schools?” and “Does VHS offer participation benefits to schools, teachers, and students?”

The overall level of customer satisfaction is related to both of these questions. VHS customers reported high levels of satisfaction with their school’s or district’s overall experience with VHS during 2007–08, as follows (and as displayed in Figure 24):

- At least 90 percent of respondents reported being *very satisfied* or *moderately satisfied* with their school experience with VHS during the 2007–08 school year. More than three fifths of all respondents stated that they were *very satisfied*.
- For the 2007–08 school year, 63 percent of principals reported being *very satisfied*, a slight increase over 58 percent selecting this rating the previous year.

Figure 24. Overall Level of Satisfaction With VHS



Note. Principal $N = 93$; site coordinator $N = 227$; superintendent $N = 36$.

Teachers also rated their overall satisfaction with their experience as a VHS instructor. Eighty-nine percent of teachers stated that they were either *very satisfied* (67 percent) or *satisfied* (22 percent) with their experience as a VHS instructor. This is an increase over the previous year, when 47 percent of teachers said they were *very satisfied*.

Benefits of Participation

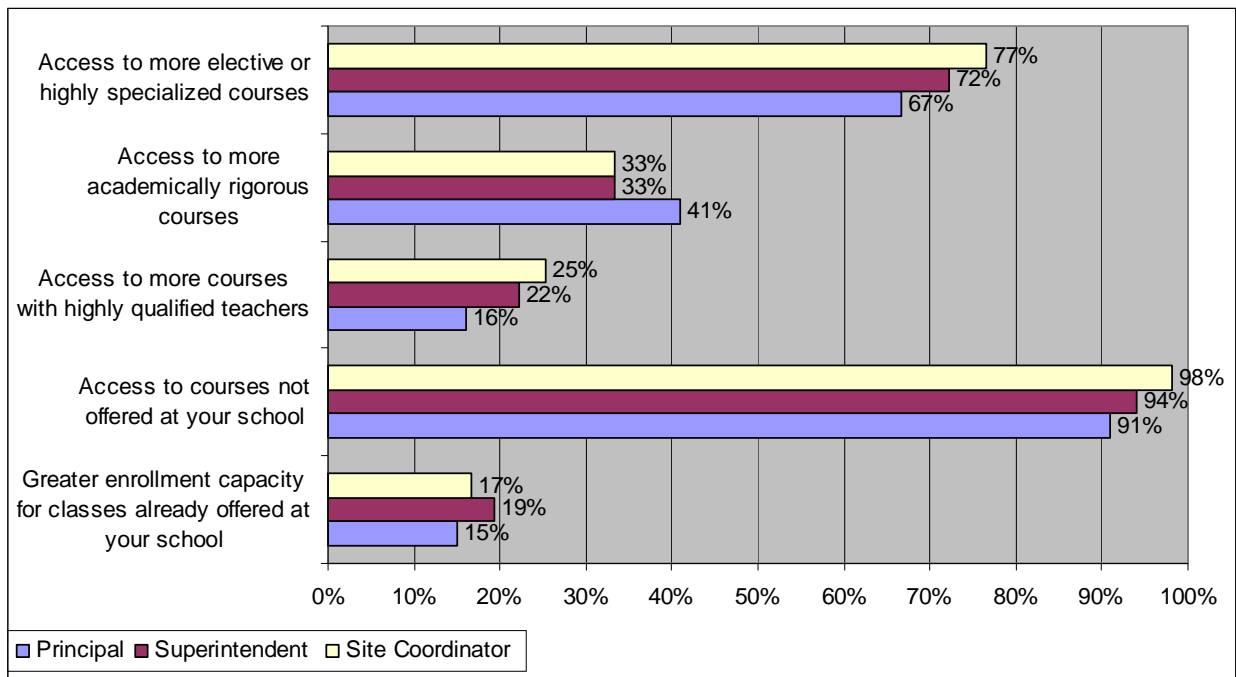
Part of the VHS mission is to “expand students’ educational opportunities and 21st century skills and offer professional development to teachers to expand the scope and depth of their instructional skills” (VHS, n.d.a). To speak to the success of this part of the mission, this section summarizes customer opinions about what benefits accrued to schools, students, and teachers as a result of VHS participation.

Benefits to Schools

In the 2007–08 VHS customer surveys, superintendents, principals, and site coordinators each were asked to select from a list of benefits the ones that were applicable to their schools. These three groups of customers were asked, “In which of the following ways has VHS expanded learning opportunities for your high school?” The rates of endorsement of five types of expanded opportunities are presented in Figure 25. Overall, there was not much variation in the proportion of responses based on the type of respondent, and answers were similar to the 2006–07 school year. The main findings are as follows:

- The two most highly endorsed benefits were “Access to courses not offered at your school” (more than 90 percent endorsing) and “Access to more elective or highly specialized courses” (at least 67 percent endorsing). The proportion of principals endorsing “Access to more elective or highly specialized courses” decreased from 80 percent to 67 percent since last year.
- A lower proportion of respondents (33 percent to 41 percent) agreed that VHS provided “Access to more academically rigorous courses.”
- The remaining two benefits, “Access to more courses with highly qualified teachers” and “Greater enrollment capacity for classes already offered at your school,” were relatively infrequently selected (15 percent to 25 percent).

Figure 25. Proportion of Respondents Endorsing School Benefits of VHS Participation



Note. Principal $N = 93$; site coordinator $N = 227$; superintendent $N = 36$.

In summary, most customers perceived that VHS participation had expanded access to courses not offered at their schools, such as elective courses.

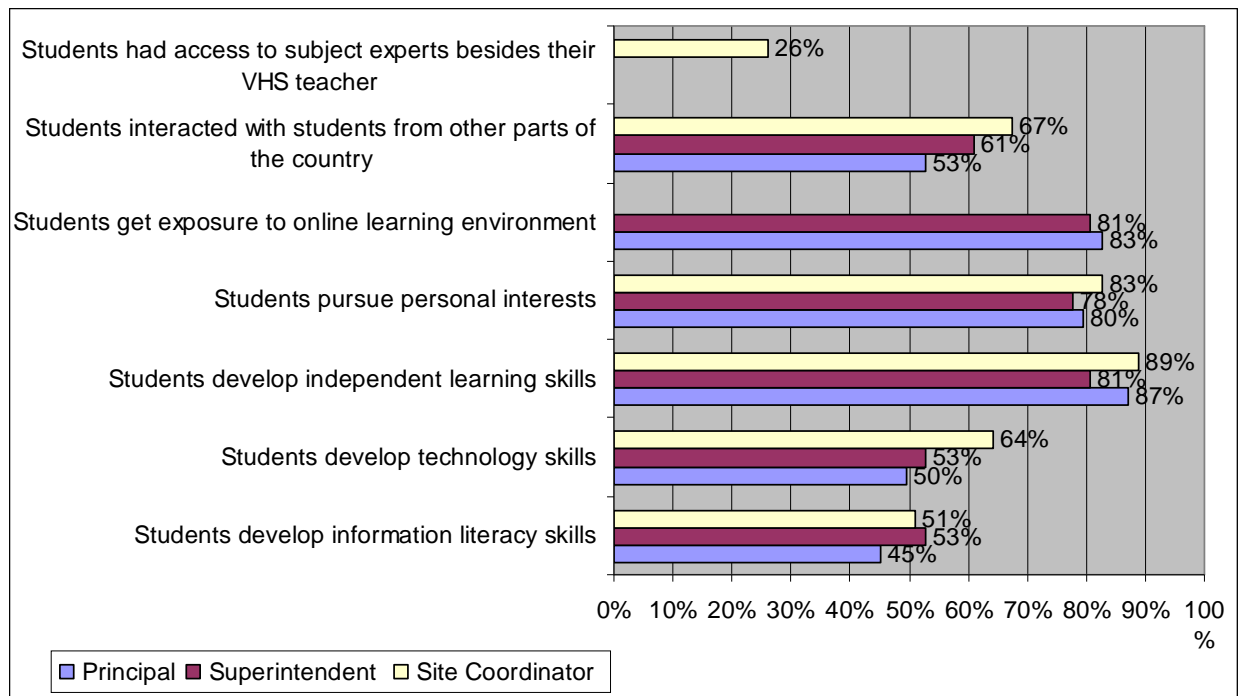
Benefits to Students

All three types of respondents were asked, “In which of the following ways have your students benefited from participating in VHS courses?” The rates of endorsement of seven types of expanded opportunities are presented in Figure 26. Note that five of these items were presented to all types of respondents, one was presented to just principals and superintendents, and one was presented to just site coordinators.

Five of the seven benefits were endorsed by at least half of all respondents, indicating that these are all prevalent. The following are the main findings:

- The most frequently endorsed student benefits, selected by more than three fourths of all respondents, were exposure to the online learning environment, pursuit of personal interests, and development of independent learning skills.
- Relatively few site coordinators (26 percent) endorsed access to subject matter experts as a benefit.
- Respondents endorsed items at rates comparable to the previous year, with one exception. A lower proportion of respondents (of all types) endorsed the benefit of gaining technology skills than in 2006–07. The most marked decline for this item was from 69 percent of principals endorsing this item in the previous year to only 50 percent in the current year.

Figure 26. Proportion of Respondents Endorsing Student Benefits of VHS Participation



Note. Principals and superintendents were not presented with the benefit referring to access to subject experts. Site coordinators were not presented with the option referring to exposure to online learning. Principal $N = 93$; site coordinator $N = 227$; superintendent $N = 36$.

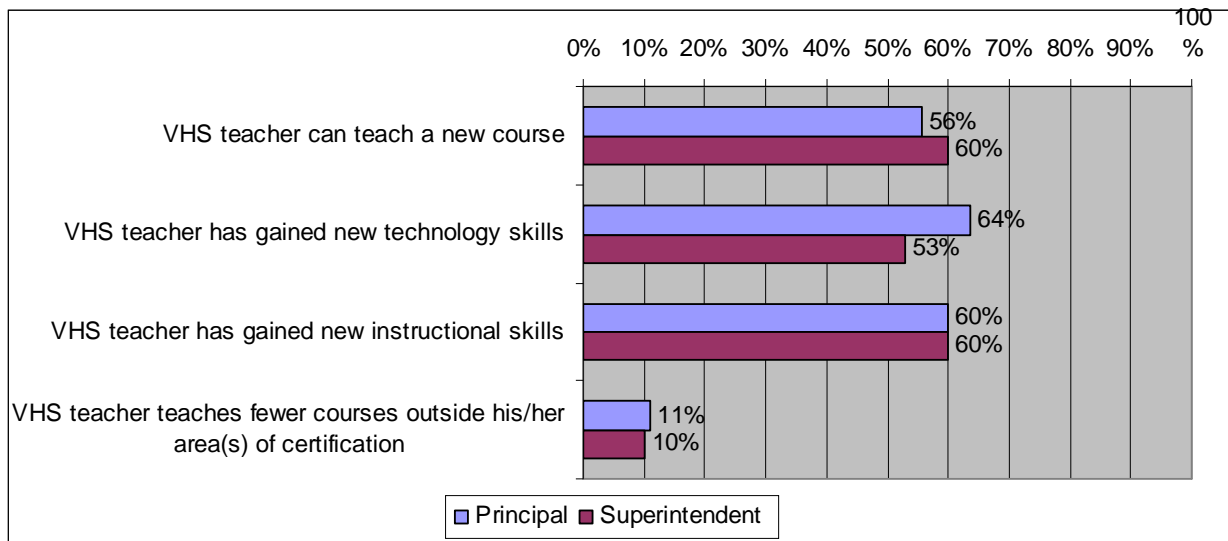
In summary, a majority of school staff agreed that VHS provided a variety of benefits to students, with most agreeing that students benefited through their exposure to online learning, pursuing personal interests, and developing independent learning skills.

Benefits to Teachers

Superintendents and principals were asked to endorse four teacher-related benefits. The following summarizes the endorsement of items presented to administrators (see Figure 27):

- For the three items related to teachers expanding their teaching skills or course repertoire, one half to three fifths of administrators endorsed the items.
- Endorsement of the technology skills and instructional skills benefits decreased from 2006–2007. In the current year, 53 percent of superintendents and 64 percent of principals endorsed the technology skills item; in the previous year, 72 percent and 73 percent endorsed the item, respectively.
- Relatively few administrators endorsed the benefit of reducing the number of teachers teaching outside their area of certification.

Figure 27. Proportion of Respondents Endorsing Teacher-Related Benefits of VHS Participation



Note. Principal $N = 63$; superintendent $N = 30$. For this group of items, 30 principals and 6 superintendents were removed from the denominator because they responded that they currently did not have a VHS teacher.

In summary, a majority of school administrators agreed that, through teaching an online course, their VHS teachers expanded their teaching repertoire, technology skills, and instructional skills.

Feasibility of Participation

This section summarizes customers’ perceptions of the feasibility of participation, with regard to the following aspects: teachers’ perceptions of the time commitment and whether it was

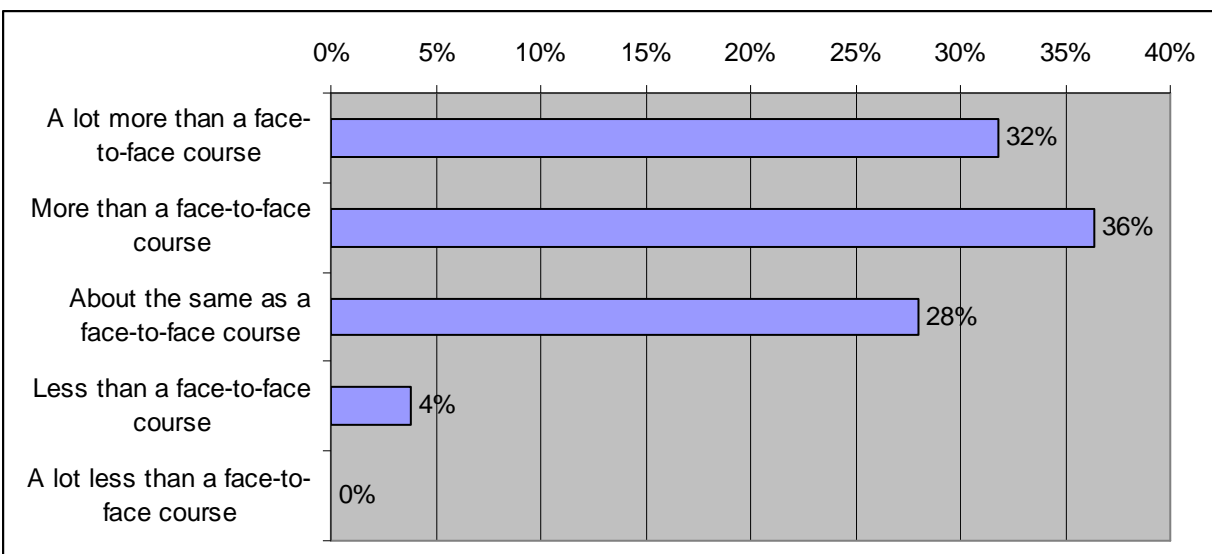
manageable, students' perceptions about time and technology resources, principals' and superintendents' perceptions of barriers to participation, and superintendents' perceptions of community support.

Time Commitment for Teaching

For VHS to operate successfully, teachers need designated time to prepare for and to teach their courses. Teachers were asked to rate how the time commitment compares to a face-to-face course and to indicate (in yes/no fashion) whether this time commitment was acceptable and whether their school provided sufficient time for them to work on their course. These survey findings were as follows:

- As depicted in Figure 28, most instructors (68 percent) reported that teaching in VHS is *more* or *a lot more* time consuming than a face-to-face course. This is less than the previous year, when 84 percent reported that teaching in VHS is *more* or *a lot more* time consuming.
- Most (86 percent) teachers indicated that the amount of time needed to teach a VHS course was acceptable to them. This is an increase from 73 percent in 2006–07.
- About three fourths of teachers reported that their school provided enough time for them to work on their VHS course. This indicates that a sizable minority of teachers (26 percent) believe that their school does not provide them with sufficient time.

Figure 28. Teachers' Ratings of Time Spent Teaching VHS Course Relative to Face-to-Face Course (N = 132)



In summary, teachers typically view the time commitment of teaching a VHS course as acceptable even though it is more time consuming than a comparable face-to-face course.

Student Resources

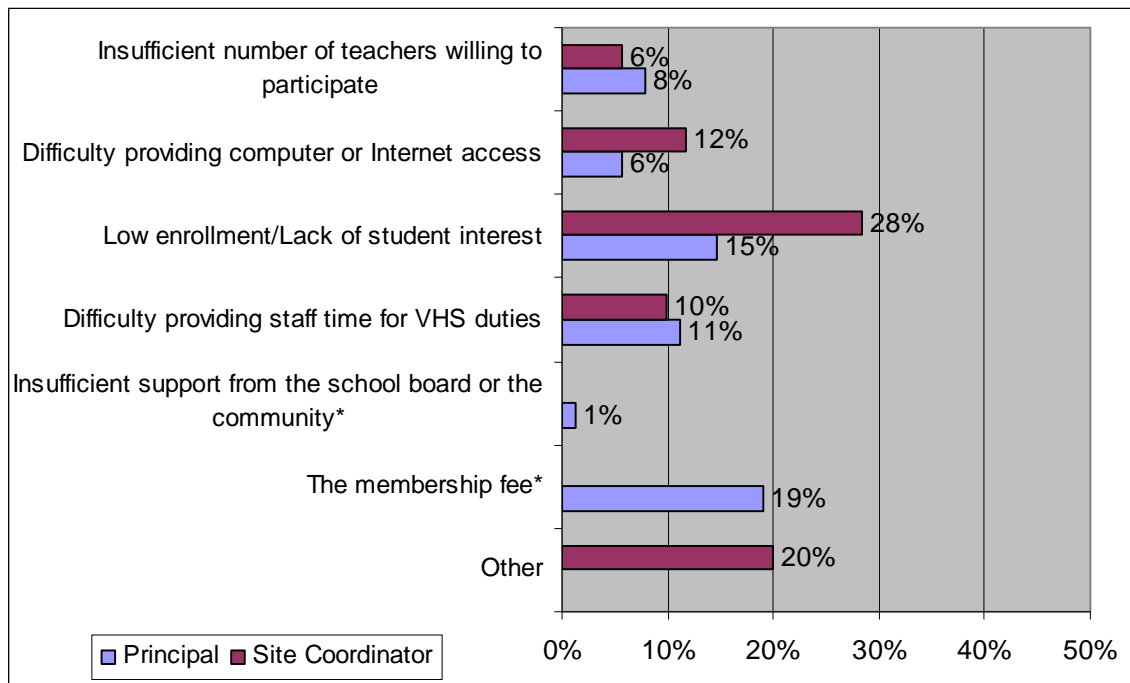
Students ($N = 2,182$) appear to have the technological resources and time during the school day to participate in their VHS course, as indicated by the following survey findings:

- Ninety-three percent of students indicated that they have a suitable computer available at their school to use when they need it.
- Eighty-nine percent of students reported that they have class time during the school day for their VHS course.

Barriers to Participation

Superintendents and principals were asked to indicate their school’s barriers to participation in VHS by selecting from a list of items. Overall, principals and site coordinators reported few barriers to participation in VHS; in fact, nearly 60 percent of principals and more than half of site coordinators reporting that there were no barriers. The most frequently selected barriers were “Low enrollment/Lack of student interest” (selected by 28 percent of site coordinators and 15 percent of principals) and “The membership fee” (selected by 19 percent of principals). In addition, 20 percent of site coordinators selected “Other.” These included the following: scheduling or space issues (“limited space in which to conduct the VHS classes”), lack of funds, student qualities (“students’ expectations and work habits”), and technological difficulties (“significant software access issues”).

Figure 29. Barriers to Participation in VHS, as Reported by Principals and Site Coordinators



Note. Site coordinator $N = 227$; principal $N = 93$.

*Site coordinators were not presented with this item on the survey.

One final aspect of feasibility is community support. Among superintendents ($N = 34$), all but one agreed that participation in VHS was perceived as “a positive district offering by school board members, parents, and community members.”

In summary, participation in VHS appears both beneficial and feasible. Most customers perceived that VHS participation had expanded access to courses not offered at their schools. A majority of school staff agreed that VHS provided a variety of benefits to students, in particular the exposure to online learning, opportunity to pursue personal interests, and the development of independent learning skills. Teachers and students typically reported having the time and equipment to work on their courses, although a sizable minority of teachers reported that they did not receive sufficient time to work on their online course. Principals and site coordinators generally reported few barriers to participation in VHS, and most superintendents reported that VHS participation was viewed positively by their constituents.

VHS Support and Communication

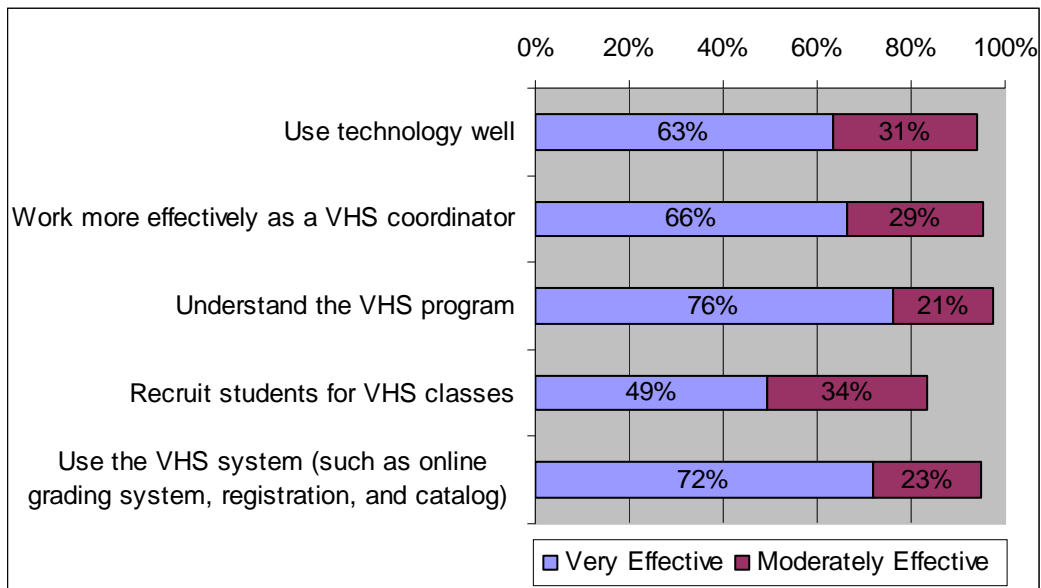
VHS offers several types of support to teachers and schools for management of courses and sites. This section describes the satisfaction of customers (including superintendents, principals, VHS teachers, and site coordinators) with VHS support services and communications, in relation to the evaluation questions, “Are schools, teachers, and students satisfied with the services provided by VHS?” and “How well does VHS communicate, and how responsive is it to its members?”

Site Coordinator Orientation

The VHS Site Coordinator Orientation (SCO) is a four-week online training course for site coordinators to learn VHS policies and procedures and the skills they need to manage online learning at their school. Site coordinators were asked how effective the orientation was in preparing them to fulfill several key components of their role. As shown in Figure 30, site coordinators typically reported that the VHS SCO was very effective in preparing them to accomplish different site management tasks.

- More than 90 percent of site coordinators reported that the orientation was *moderately effective* or *very effective* in preparing them to use technology well, work more effectively as a coordinator, understand the VHS program, and use the VHS system.
- Across all items, respondents perceived the SCO as somewhat more effective in 2007–08 than in the previous year.

Figure 30. Site Coordinator Ratings of Effectiveness of Site Coordinator Orientation in Preparing for Various Tasks



Note. For these items, *Ns* range from 150 to 156. From 4 percent to 7 percent of respondents selected *not applicable/don't know*; these were excluded from the denominator.

VHS Administrative Procedures

Site coordinators rated their satisfaction with a variety of VHS administrative procedures, including creating student accounts, registering students for VHS classes, dropping students from classes, requesting service through the Contact Center, and obtaining grade reports. Survey results produced the following findings:

- For the first four of these VHS support services, at least 80 percent of site coordinators stated they were *very satisfied*, and nearly all were at least *moderately satisfied*.
- Satisfaction for obtaining grade reports was relatively lower than for the other support services. About 79 percent were moderately or very satisfied, with 51 percent *very satisfied* and 28 percent *moderately satisfied*.
- Across all items, site coordinators expressed higher levels of satisfaction in 2007–08 than in the previous year.
- Principals also rated satisfaction with student registration and obtaining student grades. More than 90 percent of principals were moderately or very satisfied with these services, with 67 and 60 percent (respectively) selecting *very satisfied*. Across both items, principals expressed higher satisfaction than in the previous year.

Related to the administrative process of registering students is the issue of course availability. Overall, respondents were satisfied with course availability. More than 85 percent of site coordinators and principals were *moderately satisfied* or *very satisfied*, although unlike the administrative processes described above, these ratings were more evenly split between these two ratings.

Teacher Satisfaction With Course Administration Procedures

Teachers typically expressed their satisfaction with administrative procedures related to course management, as follows:

- For the procedures of viewing student enrollments and filing student grade reports, at least 85 percent were *moderately satisfied* to *very satisfied*, with more than 60 percent *very satisfied*.
- Satisfaction with the procedure of dropping students was somewhat lower, with 59 percent *moderately satisfied* to *very satisfied* (41 percent *very satisfied*). This was somewhat lower than the previous year, when 73 percent of teachers expressed satisfaction.

Teachers were invited to offer suggestions on how VHS should improve procedures for course administration. Fifty-seven teachers offered a total of 58 suggestions, mostly relating to the process for dropping students or the VHS Online Grading System. The following summarizes the teachers' responses:

- **Dropping Students.** Three fifths of the teachers offered ideas for improving the process for dropping students. The most typical suggestion was to notify teachers when students drop from their class; several teachers noted that students were not removed from their

class roster after having dropped. A related suggestion was to provide guidelines for dropping students, such as when a teacher should request that a student be dropped.

- **Online Grading System (OSG).** About one fourth of the teachers making suggestions requested that the procedures and interface of the OGS be improved. These teachers typically pointed out that the procedures were repetitive and seemed cumbersome and overly time consuming. The following comment is representative:

I think the grade report process is cumbersome and should be streamlined. The new gradebook is improved, but there are still too many screens and it wastes precious time. Also the VHS online grading requires too many screens and is cumbersome.

VHS Communications

VHS uses a variety of forms of communication to keep superintendents, principals, teachers, and site coordinators apprised of program news. These include a website (for visitors and for member-only access), a newsletter, annual report, weekly announcements, monthly account-management e-mail updates, and direct contact via e-mail or phone. Different modes of communication are targeted toward different types of roles. Each type of respondent was asked to rate each form of communication they received in terms of how beneficial it was.

The forms of communication respondents found most useful varied by their position. The most beneficial forms of communication were as follows:

- The **member-only VHS website** and **weekly announcements** were most beneficial for teachers and site coordinators. More than 90 percent of site coordinators and teachers rated the weekly announcements as *very beneficial* or *moderately beneficial*, and more than 90 percent of site coordinators and more than 80 percent of teachers rated the members' website as *very beneficial* or *moderately beneficial*.
- The **VHS website** (visitor access) was typically rated as *very beneficial* by principals, site coordinators, and superintendents, with at least three fourths of these respondents rating it *moderately beneficial* or *very beneficial*.
- The **monthly account management e-mail updates** sent to superintendents and principals were typically rated as *moderately beneficial*, with at least two thirds of each group rating it *moderately beneficial* or *very beneficial*.
- Teachers typically rated **faculty Web announcements** as *very beneficial*, with 73 percent rating them as *moderately beneficial* or *very beneficial*.
- Principals typically rated **direct contact via e-mail or phone** as *very beneficial*, with 78 percent rating this mode of communication as *moderately beneficial* or *very beneficial*.
- Finally, the **VHS newsletter** was rated as *moderately beneficial* to *very beneficial* by more than two thirds of principals, teachers, and site coordinators. Nearly 60 percent of superintendents rated it as *moderately beneficial* to *very beneficial*.

Technical and Administrative Support

Providing technical support to site coordinators and teachers is one of the essential functions of VHS. Survey respondents typically were very satisfied with the technical or administrative support they received through VHS, with proportions similar to the previous year. (It should be noted that respondents who did not seek assistance or who had no opinion were excluded from the denominator.) These findings are summarized in the following points:

- Teachers rated the helpfulness of the assistance they received from VHS staff members regarding the Blackboard platform ($N = 87$); specific problems with students, site coordinators, and schools ($N = 77$); and other aspects of technical assistance ($N = 97$). At least 90 percent of teachers found VHS staff to be *moderately helpful* to *very helpful* on these matters, with at least 71 percent finding them *very helpful*.
- Similarly, 90 percent of principals ($N = 86$) reported that they are *moderately satisfied* to *very satisfied* with the technical support they received from VHS, with 66 percent selecting *very satisfied*.
- The Contact Center is one of the primary ways VHS provides technical assistance to site coordinators. More than 95 percent of site coordinators and teachers were *moderately satisfied* or *very satisfied* with “Requesting service through the Contact Center,” with 75 percent or more selecting *very satisfied*.

Teachers rated the level of helpfulness of PROGRESS (the Web-based, ongoing professional development system) in addressing questions on technical or course-related issues. About half of the teachers who responded to the question indicated they had not been to this site. Of the remaining teachers ($N = 61$), two thirds rated it as *moderately effective* or *very effective*, with 43 percent rating it *very effective*. By the same token, more than one fourth rated PROGRESS as *somewhat effective* or *slightly/not effective*.

Suggestions for Improving Teacher Support

Teachers were asked to describe the ways in which VHS could improve its support services for teachers. Thirty-nine teachers answered this question, providing a total of 40 comments; the following points summarize their responses:

- **Communicating With Site Coordinators.** Twenty-eight percent of teachers described difficulty communicating with site coordinators. A typical suggestion was “*Stress to site coordinators the importance of prompt response to requests for help with students.*”
- **Communicating With Technical Support.** Twenty percent of teachers commented about improving communication with technical support staff. Some of these comments suggested the need for a prompt reply to requests, such as, “*The only thing I think might be improved is timeliness, though this has gotten much better over the last few years to the point that it is rarely a problem.*”
- **Submitting a Ticket.** Some teachers requested that the process for submitting a ticket be streamlined. One typical comment was “*The ticket system response was quick and*

effective, but the online form is a bit confusing. There seem to be a lot of extra questions that don't apply, especially if it is a general issue that affects all students.”

Two or three teachers each offered the following suggestions for improving teacher support:

- Foster more collaboration among teachers.
- Make the Knowledge Base easier to search.
- Improve the interface of the OGS (as described above).
- Provide more support for new teachers.
- Offer more professional development opportunities for teachers to improve the courses they currently teach.

Summary of Findings

This report may be summarized according to the guiding questions for the program evaluation.

Is VHS feasible for schools?

VHS participation appears to be highly feasible for schools, as indicated by extant program data and survey data. The following findings relate to feasibility:

- Schools are staying with the program. The retention rate of member schools was just under 85 percent after a modest decline from the previous year. Membership utilization has been stable, as schools filled two thirds of their allotted seats over the past two years.
- Most teachers are provided with time during the school day to attend to their VHS course. A sizable minority (26 percent), however, do not agree that their school provides sufficient time to work on their VHS course. Indeed, teachers typically noted that preparing for and teaching a VHS course may be more time consuming than instructing face-to-face courses.
- Students appear to have the resources (time, space, equipment) within their schools to work on their VHS courses.
- According to superintendents, district participation in VHS was nearly always perceived positively by school board, parents, and community members.
- About 60 percent of site coordinators and principals reported that there were no barriers to participation. Low enrollment or lack of student interest was the most frequently mentioned barrier.

Does VHS offer participation benefits to schools, teachers, and students?

This question is combined with the related question, “Has VHS expanded teaching and learning opportunities for schools, teachers, and students?” VHS customers expressed broad levels of satisfaction with VHS and reported several benefits of participation for schools, teachers, and students, as follows:

- Administrators were nearly unanimous in confirming that VHS expanded access to courses not offered at their schools.
- This expansion of access was noted most frequently for elective classes, and to a lesser extent, for access to rigorous courses.
- A majority of VHS customers perceived that students benefited from VHS participation in several different ways, with the three most prevalent being exposure to the online learning environment, the opportunity to pursue personal interests, and the opportunity to develop independent learning skills.
- A majority of administrators perceived that teaching a VHS class expanded a teacher’s technology and instructional skills.
- Administrators frequently concurred that teachers and students gain new technology skills, although the proportions were somewhat lower than the previous year.

Are schools, teachers, and students satisfied with the services provided by VHS?

VHS customers typically expressed high satisfaction with support services provided by VHS.

- Site coordinators, principals, and teachers expressed high satisfaction with VHS administrative processes in 2007–08, and this satisfaction has typically increased since the previous year. The sole exception is for the procedure of dropping students, as rated by teachers.
- Survey respondents typically were very satisfied with the technical or administrative support they received through VHS, with proportions similar to the previous year. In particular, almost all site coordinators and teachers were very or moderately satisfied with requesting service through the Contact Center.
- About half of the teachers reported that they had accessed the PROGRESS system. Ratings of helpfulness varied to a greater extent than for other services, although two thirds rated it as very or moderately effective.
- Some teachers suggested improving communications with technical support in regards to the timeliness of the response and with streamlining the process for submitting a ticket.
- Several teachers had difficulty in communicating with some site coordinators and requested that VHS provide assistance in facilitating this communication.

VHS customers generally expressed satisfaction with VHS administrative procedures.

- Site coordinators and principals typically were very satisfied with the procedures of creating student accounts, registering students for VHS classes, and dropping students from classes. Moreover, their satisfaction increased relative to the previous year.
- Satisfaction with obtaining grade reports was somewhat lower than for other procedures.
- Overall, respondents were satisfied with course availability.
- Teachers were highly satisfied with procedures for viewing student enrollments and filing student grade reports, and somewhat less satisfied with procedures for dropping students. In this regard, they suggested that VHS should notify teachers when dropping students and clarify guidelines for teachers regarding this process.
- Several teachers suggested improving the VHS Online Grading System to make it easier to use.

Are the rigor and quality of VHS courses and professional development sufficiently high?

Course Passing Rates. Extant data on passing rates and credit recovery rates provide a perspective on course quality.

- The overall course passing rates have remained consistently high over the past five years and stood at about 78 percent for the 2007–08 school year.

- The credit recovery success rate stood at 62 percent, somewhat lower than the 78 percent recorded the previous year.

AP Test Outcomes. Success on Advanced Placement tests provides an indicator of the quality of AP courses offered by VHS.

- The proportion of students taking the AP test rose to 89 percent in 2007–08, by far the highest proportion of test takers since VHS expanded its AP course offerings in 2003–04.
- The proportion of students passing the exam (out of those taking the exam) fell slightly to 58 percent from 61 percent the previous two years.

Satisfaction With Courses. Principals, superintendents, and site coordinators expressed high satisfaction with overall VHS course quality in the 2007–08 academic year. Teachers and students reported high satisfaction with the courses in which they themselves participated. Teachers and students were asked to rate the extent to which courses reflected standards for quality online learning in terms of instructional practice, course content, and student interactions.

- The instructional practice of teachers received high ratings from both teachers and students, with the largest room for improvement in the facilitation of group activities.
- Most students and teachers felt that the amount of work was appropriate for the course.
- Student participation was rated relatively lower than all other aspects of course quality, with student use of groups and student collaboration as the lowest rated items.
- Course content and student learning were rated very high by teachers and students.

Professional Development NetCourses. Customer survey and extant program data provided indicators of professional development quality. VHS continues to increase the number of teachers trained through its professional development courses while maintaining high satisfaction with these courses.

- Teachers typically rated the NIM or TLC courses as very effective for preparing them to accomplish a range of different online instructional tasks. These ratings are slightly yet consistently higher than the previous year.
- The effectiveness of professional development is reflected in the small percentage of teachers who were retained in the mentoring program during 2007–08.
- Teachers typically rate their mentors as very helpful in regards to the different aspects of the mentor’s role. These ratings are slightly yet consistently higher than the previous year.

How well does VHS communicate, and how responsive is it to its members?

The benefit of different forms of communication from VHS to teachers and school staff varied by position, although the most highly rated forms of communication were the website (both member-only and visitor access) and the weekly announcements.

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